The North's Beast

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The beginning

As the sun set, rain lashed against one of the “The Kingdom” neighborhoods, “Balint” was sitting at the dinner table, cradling his face with his hands, drowning in thoughts, His deep reflections were interrupted by the heavy weight of his wife's stare, he lifted his head to look at her, she was standing holding a plate in her hands, her expressions shifted from questioning to a gaze full of sadness, she began to speak with a sorrowful tone:

- Balint.. since yesterday you haven’t eaten anything

- I can’t

- I told you, even if they consider you a traitor, a bribe-taker, whatever, that doesn’t matter to me! you are my husband

- I have no clue what my fate will be, and that’s what worries me, and I’m worried about you too

- If you are worried about me then eat this food, at least one bite, your face is as pale as a ghost

Balint gave a faint smile and said:

- Anett... it’s ok give me the plate meat and rice tonight, I assume?

Anett smiled and brought the plate, sitting beside him, her face lighting up with hope, he grabbed a spoon and was about to take a bite, when he noticed that she was just sitting and watching him, looking at her curiously, he asked:

- Where is your spoon?

- I have had my food already

- Right, but I saw you eating rice alone

- You need this more than I do, don’t worry about me

Balint took his plate and placed it between himself and her saying:

- I won’t take a single bite unless you eat with me

Anett smiled shyly and said:

- If this will make you eat, I'll get my spoon then

She went to fetch a spoon to share the meal with her husband, after finishing their meal, they both sat to the nearby couch, after Balint thanked his wife for the food, he noticed the curiosity in her eyes, eager him to speak, he sighed then said:

- Alright, to be honest, I feel better now, all I had to do is accept whatever decision will be issued against me, but I want you to take care of yourself whatever happens to me

- Don't worry I will be fine, I'm just worried about you

Balint was silent for a moment, then said:

- I think you know what the expected procedure is in this situation..

Anett's features clouded, a mixture of profound grief and burgeoning dread tracing lines across her face she said with a voice filled with grief:

- The North...

Balint remained silent briefly, then said

- Yes

- And this means.. that our door might be knocked at any moment, to take you away just like what happens to others...

Balint nodded confirming, and silence fell between them as they exchange glances, during this, there was a knock at their door! Anett turned to the door, then glanced back at her husband, and her eyes were filled with worry, Balint gathered his strength and went to the door, he opened it, to find an old man with a beard, wearing a military uniform, standing with his hands behind his back, Balint said:

- Colonel Strauss!

- Balint.. I believe you know why I'm here

Balint sighed and replied:

- I do, but I would like to hear it from you

- The decision has been made regarding to you, It's difficult to say this, especially to someone like you, you will be sent to the North

- I felt it... but isn't sending there usually done by force?

- I barely convinced the higher command to not take this action against you, and that’s why I came here personally to tell you, tomorrow at seven in the evening, go to the center and turn yourself in, from there, you will be transferred to the North, and if you don’t...

Balint interrupted him saying:

- I’ll be dragged there if I don’t, I know

- You know that I trust you, and I don’t believe anything written in your file

- I feel anger Colonel, the suspected person is innocent, and I’m the corrupted one! you know who I mean

- I will strive to investigate this accusation and clear your name

- And since when is 'corruption' a death sentence!? Normally you imprison them what has changed now?!

But Colonel Strauss didn’t respond with a word, they both looked at each other in silence for a moment, then Strauss smiled and said:

- See you tomorrow, Captain Balint

Strauss then turned his back and went away fading in the dark street, without looking back, Balint closed the door feeling a mix of emotions, sadness, confusion, and worry, he returned inside, thinking of all possibilities, and what’s coming

Unexpected Punishment

Amidst the heavy gunfire, Balint returned to the barracks, wounded in his right arm, as he entered, he saw his unit in front of him, they were scattered, he noticed the obvious tension appearing on them, quickly he requested for gathering, standing firmly, ignoring the pouring blood from his arm, said:

- I went along with unit 5 to the nearby valley to scout enemy movements, but the place was suspiciously empty, later a heavy barrage of bullets rained down on us, forcing us to scatter and it turns out it was a set up, I was able to fallback despite the siege, no one was killed but there are four wounded soldiers, during my retreat I was hit by a bullet in

right arm, the wound is not serious so it will not be an obstacle, now we must save our soldiers, anyone who is not willing to die doing this can stay back, I understand the difficulty of such an action, especially since those trapped soldiers might be already dead, but if we make it back, anyone who stayed behind, don't bother showing your face when we return!

After finishing his speech, the soldiers were hyped and their morale increased, Balint gathered his breath and sat on a nearby chair, a soldier with a bandage kit approached him, the soldier began to examine the wound and treating it, once he finished examining he looked at Balint smiling and said:

- Captain, thank God the bullet has came out, treating the wound will be easy

Balint remained silent as the soldier kept treating, watching over the soldiers preparing and whispering among themselves, he could see the determination in some of their eyes, and fear in some other, he looked at the soldier treating him and said:

- Julian, I didn’t mean to insult you with my words, but you know who I’m referring to, they are the ones who should hear this

Julian was silent for a moment then said:

- We all trust your leadership and your decisions, but this is war, and intensity is required

Then he smiled with a wink saying:

- And I know you mean that rat and his kind

Balint smiled proudly and said:

- That’s what makes me happy, I see a leader in each one of you, and that’s my goal, we are all leaders here... except for Jaros

Among the soldiers, Jaros came out approaching Balint with skeptical expressions on his face, saying:

- I know you would fall into a trap, it was obvious

And then he sighed and said in sarcastic tone:

- it’s surprising you even returned!

Resentment and anger were evident on Balint's face, he was about to respond before Julian interrupted him , throwing the bandage kit from his hand, and stood up quickly, facing Jaros with eyes full of rage and shouted:

- You think you are some genius don’t you? spending your time predicting every disaster, and then when one happens, you show off as if you who saw it coming

Then he took a breath and continue saying:

- When will you stop your lies and arrogance?! From the first days of training, you’ve been the same disgusting person, If you haven't heard this before, hear it NOW! You are nothing but a SCUM and worth less than the dirt clinging to my boots, you filthy “Westerner”

On the other side Jaros was stunned by what he just heard and responded angrily:

- And you are nothing more than a “Servant” It’s only natural for your kind to bark whenever the 'Royals' command, you are nothing but a rabid dog!

- You are using the enemy's terms! Your true identity that you hide has been revealed to everyone, you hypocrite!

Julian took a step forward and punched Jaros in the face, the others gathered around them, trying to stop both of them from fighting, voices rose and tension spread among everyone, In the midst of the loud noises, Balint fired a shot into the ground and stepped between them, his eyes burning red with anger as he shouted:

- STOP! Or the next bullet will not be on the ground, our soldiers might be dying under a siege and both of you fighting over things that our enemies have stirred up, we shall never see victory if we are divided like this

And then Balint looked at the rest of the soldiers and said:

- Anyone who’s going to rescue our soldiers, get ready!

after five minutes, Balint came out, rifle in his hand, and found everyone assembled before him.. Not a single person had left, his deputy, Jaros, stood at the back, avoiding his gaze, the group began to

move, following Balint to rescue the captured soldiers.. After a while, just before the rescue unit reaches the valley, Jaros started speaking to the soldier next to him:

- He is leading us to death! I have no clue why they put him in charge of us

The soldier remained silent and didn't respond with a word, Jaros continued:

- I know I know... you can't speak because you are scared to do so, but don't worry things will change soon...

Jaros let out a sharp, sinister laugh that echoed through the ranks, drawing cold stares from the men, at the front of the unit, Balint was talking alongside Julian, Balint said:

- Julian... listen I agree with what you did, but the timing isn't right, we have a more important duty

- I know... I just couldn't hold myself anymore, I felt he must be shut up, at least for once, I've had enough of him, I'm sick of him.. I'm tired of his lies, his contradictions, his flattery, and his arrogance the fact that he breathes the same air as I do is an insult I can no longer endure!

- Calm down, I totally agree with everything you said, and I blame no one but the headquarters that made him the deputy

- God knows how much he paid them for this

- there is no evidence for that, But I don't blame you because it's what I believe too, when I sent them a request to appoint you as my deputy, they chose him "for his competence" as they put it

- "competence" that only exists in his mind

The unit arrived at the designated location, and at that moment, Balint ordered the unit to halt, he approached his deputy and said:

- I have a plan, it needs some risk, but there is no other solution

- What's the plan?

- I'll take three soldiers with me and head down the valley, the enemies will detect me, and then I'll draw their attention to scatter them, then you with the rest of the soldiers will circle them and ambush them, this way we will neutralize them and free our trapped soldiers.

Jaros looked aside, then nodded in agreement

- Keep this plan a secret, I don't want the three soldiers to hesitate from such a risky move..

Then Balint took Julian along with two other recruits and headed down to the valley, he was certain that the enemies will open fire at any moment He ordered his men to move in an erratic pattern until the gunfire started pouring down on them, quickly, Balint and his soldiers took cover behind large rocks, then he gave order to fire randomly to mislead the enemies, after a while Balint commanded his men to stop fire entirely, to trick the enemies that they ran out of ammo, the enemy stopped shooting, and Balint knew they were approaching, but as the enemies were close, they were taken by surprise by Jaros and the rest of the soldiers ambushing them from behind, Balint and his soldiers joined the attack, and together, they defeated the enemies, the trapped soldiers were freed, and despite the intensity of the situation, not a single life was lost in this mission, the news of the rescue of the Fifth Unit spread quickly throughout the ranks of the army, Balint's reputation grew significantly, known for his leadership and bravery, always willing to sacrifice himself for others.. A few days later, on a cold night...

while Balint was sitting in his office, suddenly several soldiers wearing a distinctive black coats burst in, and confronted him, Balint recognized them, and stood up from his chair in surprise, asking:

- What’s going on!?

One of them stepped forward and spoke in a sharp tone:

- Orders have been issued for your immediate relief of command, you must return home until a final decision is made upon your case

The shock was clear on Balint’s face as he heard these unexpected words, he replied in a confused voice:

- Relief of command?! Return home?! What are you talking about? What did I do!

The soldier filled with anger, took several steps more forward, slammed Balint's desk with his hand, and shouted:

- And you have the audacity to talk!? You corrupted bribe-taker! You know what you did, now hand over your gun and don’t make this difficult

The soldier’s words left Balint in even deeper shock, but he realized that arguing would get him nowhere, being helpless and with no option, he sighed, stood up, and handed over his gun and surrendered to them, they assigned a car along with guards to take him back to his residence, where he will remain under house arrest, the situation remained shrouded with mystery, as no further details were provided to him, after few days Balint returned to his home, and with every passing second, A suffocating shroud of agony, grief, and terror settled deep within him.

Departure

The next day, Balint was preparing for his unknown trip, he wore his brown coat, the weather in the Northern isolated forests is cold enough, then he tied back his long blond hair, his wife entered the room, and looked at him, he clearly saw the sadness in her eyes that are reddened from tears, in an attempt to lighten the mood, he smiled and said:

- I still remember you weeping on our engagement day, swearing you'd never marry a soldier

Despite her sadness, she smiled faintly saying:

- You’re different.. But now I see the bad side of this

- everyone faces risks regardless of their jobs, but I will come back, I promise

- How will we communicate? How I will know your condition

- Honestly.. I don’t know, I will talk to Strauss about this matter, you can trust him along with anyone on his side, If possible, I will write a message to you

- good, take care of yourself, may God protect you, and comeback safe

- I will.. don’t worry, and remember where I keep the gun.. Don't hesitate to use it if you have to

Balint said goodbye to his wife, and left the house in rush and headed directly to the Command Center to turn himself in, and there he met up with Strauss, they sat at the desk, and Strauss began to speak:

- I’m pleased to see you

- I wouldn’t betray my word

- I know, I completely trust you

- Now I want to know the details

- Well look, firstly you will be sent there for three months, during these months you can’t return unless you do certain assigned tasks, including the investigation into the disappearance of “Unit Seven”

- What about those who returned from there? Have any of them comeback because they completed this task?

- Ever since Unit Seven vanished, every man sent into those woods has come back empty-handed, they returned when the punishment period ended only

- And what will make different from them?

Strauss remained silent for a moment, then said:

- You are different, but even, I don’t want you to take too many risks doing that, I want you to search for survivors from the Unit, without them you will never reach to the truth of the North..

- And how the “truth” will come through them? And are you even sure there are survivors?

- I'm sure they're out there.. Just look for them carefully.. and don't believe everything you hear

There was something mysterious in Strauss's words.. Balint thought about it for a few seconds, then remembered the communication matter and said:

- I want to ask you about something else

- Go ahead

- Communication

- there is supposed to be electricity, and you have a wireless radio in the cabin, and you can use it to communicate with me personally

Strauss pointed to the device in the corner of the room, Balint turned and looked at the device, then turned back to Strauss and said:

- What about my wife?

- As for your wife we will inform her to deliver messages to us, and then will forward them to you

- Great, thanks Colonel

- It’s my duty, and as I told you, the procedures are much stricter, but your well known competence has spared you

- The accusation against me.. You don’t believe do you?

- No, but the matter is beyond my control

Balint asked in disbelief:

- Aren’t you the head of the Scouting Department in the army?

- It’s more complicated than you think.. The Royal Guard is handling the paperwork on this one, my hands are tied, and I don’t have much authority over them, all I can do is reduce their intensity on you

- And who is the one who accused me with such a crime!

Strauss paused for a moment, then said:

- I can't tell you right now

- but...

But a soldier from the “Royal Guard” interrupted their conversation, asking Balint to begin preparing for his departure, Balint looked at him and nodded, then turned to Strauss and said:

- See you later Colonel Strauss

- You too Captain

The two bid farewell to each other, and Balint headed to another room where he was given a

weapon and some typical instructions, after completing the procedures, he went to the vehicle that will take him North.. the car set off, taking him to his unknown fate, he sat in the back seat gazing the streets of the city around him, looking at them as if it’s the last time

The North

The outlines of the city began to disappear, and long dark trees started to appear on the side of the road, I felt a strange sensation that I never felt before, I took a look at the driver, who had never spoken a word all this time, he was an average built man with a bit of shabby appearance, I was looking at him for a while he turned his head back and glanced at me, sighed slightly, then said:

- listen, I don’t like talking to passengers, but you seem a bit different

- How so?

- Most idiots that I drive don’t shut up, and they keep asking multiple annoying meaningless questions repeatedly, and those who cry like babies...

Then he imitated their crying to mock them and continued saying:

- As if I can do something for them! But you.. You are just sitting there..

- And will crying help me not going to the North?

- well tell that to those fools! By the way, I heard that you are a captain of a scout unit, how did you end up here?

- will you believe me if I say I'm innocent?

The driver laughed sarcastically and said:

- I thought you were different, listen.. Be honest, what have you done ,that caused you to be in this old car going with me to that doomed place

- You don't want to believe what's the point of trying to convince you?

The driver remained silent for a moment then said:

- fine forget about it

He seemed a bit unsettled from my response, a silence followed, I broke it saying:

- You drive people there do you drive them back too?

- Yeah, I drive them back, but they aren't the same people I dropped off

- What do they say?

- Some talk to themselves.. Others stay completely silent, but it’s fair to say I got used to their insanity

- Are you coming regularly? Or only when my mission is over?

- No, only when their sentence there is over

- Am I the only soldier there?

- You might be

- What do you mean?

- Well, theoretically you are the only one, but you might encounter someone, in the past the “Kingdom” was more concerned about the “North” and they used to send a lot of soldiers, and here I mean specialists in these matters, but mysterious incidents occurred, and the most notable of them is the sudden disappearance of dozens of specialists, the notorious disappearance of “Unit seven”, and after that, only individuals are sent here, some of them got lost.. And maybe they tried to escape

- Yes what about escaping?

The driver turned and looked at me surprised and said:

- Are you planing to it already?

- NO no I am just asking

- fine, some have attempt to do so, but the area surrounding the “North” is isolated, and there is no life there, some of them have been found dead in these forests around us, and some have gone missing without a single trace...

- And what are the rumors that shroud that place? I want to hear them anyway

- well.. There are official reports about mysterious creatures with unclear nature, as well as criminal activities.. And.. It is said that there are reports about witnesses practice to certain rituals

- Rituals?

- There are some maniacs who escape to such areas to isolate themselves and do whatever their unstable mind tells them, sometimes I see them on this road, they seem really unsettling ,they never

caused any harm so far but if they do so.. I have “Zorn” to slice them up

- Zorn?

The driver then lifted a rifle beside him and said:

- This is “Zorn” He is the quiet type,doesn't say much until he has to

I smiled, laughing about the situation and said:

- Seems like there is a lot to talk about

- You will see more enough there

- And it seems because of what happened in the past the “Kingdom” is no longer interested in the “North”

- Sure, the disappearance incident has changed and restricted the standards of dealing with this matter

- What changed exactly?

As I told you, in the current situation only punished individuals are sent, and for those.. It’s even difficult to just stay in their safe zone, anyway you should get some rest there still a long way ahead

I looked out the car window thinking of each word the driver said.. There are some questions if they are answered they just creat more inquiries, and I already don’t want to ask too much.. My wife.. I wondered what she was feeling, I left the house quickly because I can’t bear goodbyes, the rain began to pour, these trees are getting more ominous with this rough weather, all I need now is some peaceful sleep, it might be the last time I sleep in a safe place..

I woke up to the driver’s harsh voice, I rubbed my eyes and looked around me, the sun had just set, and trees had sunk into darkness, I looked at the driver and clearly he was unpleasant, and I said:

- You could be more of a problem than whatever’s hiding around here

He smiled saying:

- I don’t believe you will say that when I pick you up next time.. If I even do so

I got out of the car inspecting the area surrounding me, first thing I notice is that the road ahead of me has ended an turned into a rugged path that cars

can’t cross easily, I looked back at the driver, confused, and said:

- And.. Where is the place that I suppose to be in? The “safe place”

- I can’t drive through that road, take your things and keep going on foot, the “safe place” is nearby and it shouldn’t take you more than thirty minutes to get there

- Fine, is everything I need there?

- well if it’s not eaten by rats, then yes, and you can hunt rabbits don’t worry

- I didn’t catch your name yet?

- You can call me Franz

- Alright, Franz

- Oh and don’t forget to turn on the generator, you need it for lights and the radio

- Do the noises attract creatures?

- Actually, it keeps them away, according to what have been said

- Fine, it’s a pleasure to meet you, see you later

- Me too

I took my bag out of the car trunk, and began moving forward, marching through the dark forest, while I hear the car sound slowly fading away as it goes further away back, and now this was the moment of true severance, I was beyond the reach of the Kingdom now, the King's laws didn't apply to these woods, a sensation of fear was dominating me, but the hope to reach the safe place is what pushes me forward, after one hour, I finally reached the place, there was a medium height iron fence surrounding a cabin, and the gate was locked, I had the key in my hand, it was given to me along with the other stuff, I opened it entered, then locked it immediately, and now in front of the cabin, and beside it, I saw the generator, I went directly to it to inspect it and it seemed to be in a good condition, I tried to start it but nothing happened I was worried and thought to check the fuel tank to find out that it was out of fuel, I searched the cabin surroundings desperately for any fuel, I returned to the cabin opened the door, the cabin was ordinary, nothing so special, a bed in one corner and large wardrobe in another, in the middle was a desk with a radio on it,

I closed the door and again, I tried to look for fuel but found none, I placed my bag on the ground, then went and sat on the rusty bed, I looked around me and I can barely see anything in this darkness, I got up to check the supplies, I opened the wardrobe and found several cans of food and enough water, and paper, I took it to read it and it contains the following:

Priceless, don’t miss your final chance 39,21

I put it away, I went to the radio and looked at it hopelessly.. It was my only way to maintain any kind of communications with the “Kingdom”.. My tactical advantage vanished with the fuel.. Without the radio, I was a ghost.. How will I inform them if anything occurs?! Even if I find a missing person here how to inform that too? Franz wouldn't return for at least three months from now, it’s my first night here and I already seem helpless. These negative thoughts had crept into my mind, and I should not surrender to it, amidst this gloomy darkness I noticed a lantern under the desk, I leant down and grab it with my left hand and lit it, it was the only light in the middle of this forest.. I lied down on the bed and closed my eyes attempting to zone out of this harsh situation, I want to sleep now to go out tomorrow in the daylight, however this wasn’t possible as I spent the

first night in a restless sleep, I wake up at dawn.. Feeling a bit safer since I was able now to see what lays among those surrounding trees, I had half can of food and drink my need of water, the supplies will be enough for weeks only and it will not cover the whole duration, I have to scout the area as fast as I can regardless of potential risks, I put on my coat and gloves, and took my gun and binoculars, and kept my only grenade hidden in the cabin, I went outside and started scouting the area, trees where everywhere, I decided to head more North, during my way I left tracks behind me to help me find my way back, I reached an area where trees started to thin out, I noticed some of these trees are completely burned.. I suspected that the reason might be lightings, but upon closer inspection, it seemed intentional, silence dominated the place, I didn't even see any wildlife, I kept going on my way until I reached a wide plain filled with beautiful flowers and small bushes, I admired the beautiful place for a moment and then began to walk through it, it was surrounded by trees from all sides, there was a creek in the middle of it, I thanked God for fresh water source being available, and rushed into it, the water was clear enough, I scooped the water with my hand and drink it until I got satisfied, I washed my face and stroked my beard with it, then

filled a bottle that I was carrying, I wanted to continue up ahead but I felt unsettle to do so, I'm comfortable here and I don't want to dive into an unknown fate, I headed back.. I tried to catch anything unusual, but despite the burned trees that I saw as well everything was stable, I reached near the cabin and start to walk faster to reach it, and at the moment I stood in front of it, suddenly I heard something moving in the nearby bushs! I raised and my pointed my rifle immediately to the sound's source, I waited for sometime holding my rifle straight and looking around me carefuly, a minute passed and nothing occured, I went inside and closed the door, "it could be an animal" I said to myself, and accompanied with my internal fear, this could make me see, hear, and think about things that don't exist, I just hope this doesn't happen again, because next time I'll not hesitate to shoot, and I don't want to lose control of myself, Franz said something about a cult here.. I need to show them that I don't mind spilling their blood, I will not let them manipulate me, I spent the rest of the day inside, I feel that the place is forcing me to stay away from something.. But this won't last long, I will continue my scouting later, Franz mentioned that the former soldiers were scared only, he didn't say a word about a physical wound, whatever lays down

in this woods, I think it’s only capable of intimidation.. After a boring day inside the cabin, the sun had set and the light began to vanish, I lied on my bed, thinking of tomorrow, with a huge determination to not let anything prevent me from moving forward.

I started my day with patrolling around the cabin, initially everything seemed normal, I placed some animal traps around the in same area I heard the voice from yesterday, I went back to the same area I stopped at yesterday, I started to go through the woods Northern from the plain, but just before I enter between the trees.. I noticed something on the ground, I got closer to it and saw it, it was a slaughtered small deer carcass, I inspected it, and the blood was fresh.. Now I feel certain that there is someone, or a lot here with me, I feel watched, and this body seems like a threat, but if they want to threat... they should try harder, I ignored it, and kept moving forward carving my way through trees, but an unsettlement sensation forced me to keep looking around me all the time, which made me distracted, I finally started to see animals around, rabbits, squirrels, I felt calm a bit, these are the first living creatures I see here, after walking for a while,

I felt I dived too deep for nothing, I went back before I lose track, and on my way I had no one to blame but the stupid headquarters that did not even equipped us with maps, corruption was highly spread even in the main fighting regions, what do I expect it to be in this remote place? No one answers many questions.. The most notable is... where is “Unit Seven”? How come a whole unit full of specialist disappear like that with no trace! And why I’m here? Isolated from everything, me specifically and I haven't done a thing! I couldn’t hold my anger, and hit a tree log next to me, I took a breath and pulled myself together, I shouldn't let fury pull me from the track, despite not being certain what is it, I reached the middle of the plain and while I was passing by it, suddenly I heard a loud scream west of me! It sounded like a ragged intermittent cries of a helpless person, the far cry vanished, but its effect remained in me, it froze me in place, I went to the cabin direction immediately while holding my rifle, and as I merged among the trees, I started to pace quickly, until I reached the cabin, I went inside, stood in front of the “useless” communication device, I put my rifle aside, and started desperately turning it on, years in the army and never felt such fear, the “unknown” always scares more.. This was said to me once..I remembered something, the traps that I

set, I rushed outside and went to check it, first one was untouched, as for the second one I found a rabbit in it, the rest were just as casual, but the very last one was different.. It was broken, and whatever fall in it had did so, I noticed footsteps next to it, I tried to follow the trail of it, but it as I did it started to vanish, I realized that whatever this is.. He knows what he is doing, my suspicions are now confirmed, I went back inside, while thinking for a plan to capture this “unknown watcher”, if he wanted to harm me, he would have already done so, or maybe he is seeking a better opportunity to do so, sleeping won’t be easy in such state, I need to be cautious, until I neutralize the risk, but still there is something not evident.. Well in fact multiple things.

The Hospital

In the morning, Anett woke up, making herself a quick breakfast, she had it alone feeling bored and anxious about her husband, it’s been a week and she hadn’t heard anything from him, so she decided to go to Strauss herself seeking any news about Balint, and if possible sending him a letter, she then wanted to distract her mind so she turned the radio on a typical morning show, she didn't have any energy left to observe war news, after a while of listening, she felt a bit calm and comfort and snapped out of her negative thoughts, but this calmness was disturbed as the pleasant melody was cut short by a jarring, repetitive pulse of static followed by a sharp voice saying:

- ALERT! ENEMIES JETS ARE DETECTED IN OUR AIRSPACE! EVERYONE MUST PROCEED TO A NEARBY SHELTER UNTIL THE THREAT IS OVER, THIS IS NOT A DRILL, THIS IS NOT A DRILL

She immediately shut down the radio, rushed into a shelter in her home, she went down and closed the door behind her, and remained in, hearing the airstrikes in varying ranges, after one hour she went out, she put on her work clothes quickly and rushed to her work, since she left the house and during all her way, she kept seeing people getting out of the public shelters with fear and hesitation, Anett then noticed a large black smoke cloud coming out of the same direction she was heading to, she was confused thinking what this could be, but a horrifying possibility crossed her mind, she was horrified just to think of such a possibility, a sense of curiosity accompanied with worry made her walk faster that she almost trotted, as she got closer her thoughts become true.. She finally reached her destination, and despite prior expectations and hearing people in the street talking about it.. Witnessing the carnage with her own eyes was another thing entirely, it was true, the hospital had been bombed! People were surrounding the rubble, there was discarded toy covered with dust and blood next it.. some were crying helplessly, and some others were trying to help the rescue teams desperately to lift the rubble, hoping to find a life underneath it.. Anett was stunned by what she just witnessed, putting her hands on her mouth, tears

came out of her eyes, unable to believe that the enemies had just bombed a Children's hospital!

Anett went back to her neighborhood carrying a sharp, deep pain.. The faces of poor children she took care of in the past days never left her mind.. She reached to the front of her house and saw an old woman waiting for her there.. She was the last person Anett wished to see, the old woman rushed into her anxiously, her eyes were full of tears, and said:

- Anett, please.. The news.. Tell me it isn't true!

Anett stood silent unable to say a word, her silence and the tears that poured down from her eyes were the answer to the old woman’s question, which her grandson was in that hospital since a week.. Anett went inside, leaving the old woman crying painfully behind her.. She sat on her couch while she was mentally devastated, such tragedy had never occurred before, a lot of buildings had been bombed but that never happened to hospital rather a “Children” one! In war laws this never happen, hospitals are forbidden to be targeted, only a villain can do so.. Anett didn’t want to just sit desperate doing nothing, she decided to act, she went outside and informed all her neighbors that she is willing to

give aid to all children in need, she spent the rest of her day treating children in her house that she turned into a temporary clinic, she refused to take any fees from her patients, on the contrary, she paid from her own budget to help buying some medicine to those who couldn't afford it.. And later it turned out that her neighbor’s grandson had miraculously survived along with other children who were rescued.. at sunset, and after she finished taking care of ill children, she took a message that she wrote to her husband and went to the Headquarters of scout branch.. There, when she told the guards about the purpose of her visit, one of them said:

- So, you are the traitor's wife, are you?

- excuse me!?

- go away, we don't serve your kind

They both kept arguing and their voices got louder, until someone came out and ordered to stop the argument, and said:

- Colonel Strauss ordered to let the lady in

Anett smiled and cast the guard a victorious glance, then she walked along the deputy to Struss’s office,

she entered and he welcomed her, she took a seat and said:

- Colonel, I have heard from my husband before that you maintain communication with him, I have this message

She opened her bag taking out an envelope and handed it to him while continuing saying:

- It’s in this envelope, and if it demands charges, I have money

She pulls out some money and handed it along with the envelope on the table, Struss put his hands on both and pushed them slightly to her saying:

- Fine, calm down there is no need for this, if we want to communicate with him that will happen in that device

And he pointed to a communication device in the room’s corner, Anett stood up and went to the device and examined it, she then looked at Strauss smiling and said in an excited tone:

- Great then!, please tell me, how is he? how is he handling everything there? And can I maybe talk to him through here?

- Strauss put his hands on the table, and didn’t respond, he was evidently confused, took a deep breath and said:

- It is difficult to say this but he had been there for a week and we did not receive a single message from him, I myself sent a lot of calls but... nothing!

The Truth

It's been a week now and nothing has changed, no progress, I scouted the area surrounding the plain and nothing neither, I feel I’m walking in endless trees.. The traps are no longer useful.. disturbing things are increasing, screams, animal corpses, and threats engraved on tress rocks.. And despite walking in the direction of these things, I never encounter a thing.. I started to hunt rabbits because I’m concerned to run out of sustenance.. Now I’m sitting on the chair, sharpening my knife for hunting, I don’t want to waste ammunition.. It's deep dark outside along with an unsettling silence, except for the cawing of crows and the sound of sharpening.. I peeked at the window, I can barely see some trees, I kept staring at it until I felt something is off, I looked closely and realized that there is a dark figure between these trees! I stopped sharpening while I’m looking at it, frozen in my place, I felt it was coming closer and closer.. In a swift maneuver I took the rifle from the ground aimed and shot a bullet without

a second thought, the bullet pierced through the window and shattered it, then hit it target, and I start to hear screams coming out of it.. I rushed out quickly holding a lantern in my right and my rifle in the other, I reached it... “him”, he was on the ground the shot has hit his left leg, he was writhing in pain while holding the wound with his hand, long black hair, a beard, and he wears glasses.. I shouted at him while aiming my rifle straight to his head:

- You are under my mercy now you stalker! Since I stepped foot in this place and you've been sneaking on me!

He looked at me and said:

- You idiot! I'm on your side.. No wonder they sent you here!

- liar! You sure one of this “cult” trying to manipulate me all this time! You have fallen into my hands and no mercy will be shown to you

Despite his pain he laughed sarcastically and said:

- A “cult” you said! You still think this is a cult?! Some band of devil-worshippers or madmen? The only madmen in this country are the ones sitting at Headquarters!

Then he took an identity card from his pocket and showed it to me and said:

- I'm doctor Eisenhower, I was a member of "Unit seven" I'm the sole survivor

I took his card and examine it carefully, and the intel he provided me was authentic, the card clearly shows that he is a military doctor, and the photo was identical, I looked at him regretting what I've done, I pulled him up and supported him until we reached the cabin, I had a simple first aid kit, I took it out to treat his wound, but he immediately swipe it from my hand, and said:

- I can take care of myself

Eisenhower started to clear his wound while he was laying on the bed.. I took a chair and sat in front of him and said:

- Doctor... I've been here almost for a week and I don't get what is going on.. I see and hear eerie things and when I dig after them I find nothing.. Oh I almost forgot, I only found this piece of paper

I took out a paper I found sticked on tree, it had a sketch of long faceless figure and the word "NO" around it repeated on all what's left of the paper.. I

handed it to Eisenhower, he hold it, took a quick look at it, then he crumbled it and said mockingly:

- Looks like they messed with you really good

- I can’t deal with more ambiguity, tell me about everything

- Well... listen carefully...

A year earlier, I’ve been sent along with “Unit Seven”, the unit involved different specialist do for the sake of studying the suspicious nature of this place.. I didn’t stay long with them, I left them and went out the woods and never come back.. I spent long time alone until I met three individuals, despite being afraid of them due to what’s said about this place, they seemed normal, they asked me if I was a “Rebel for liberation” well I can only say “yes” to them despite not understanding what they mean exactly.. They were really thrilled when they found out that I'm a doctor, they asked me to follow them, I did until we reached a camp.. There I met their leader “Mirko” , he is a gloomy looking man, bald, short, and a pale face.. He welcomed me warmly as if he was expecting my arrival with impatience.. He

told me everything... those people are not a certain cult nor associated with any odd rituals, in fact... this is what they “want” to be known as, but in reality those are rebels, who hate the crown, and they intentionally staged these eerie acts to scare the Kingdom into leaving this forest alone.. Their goal is to recruit more until the right opportunity comes, they owe allegiance to the “Westerners” but there's no cooperation between both nor any type of coordination.. When I found myself surrounded I had to lie and say that I had defected from my unit, I showed him my ID and we he made sure that I’m a doctor he was pleased, since most of the people who joins him are just bunch of ignoramuses and idiots, and there isn’t a single person from the military or a politician.. I spent the next days learning the core of their principles, which they contradict in their behavior, they called for “Justice and equality” and at the same time Mirko mistreat those who are lower then him, and if I wasn’t a doctor I would end up treated like them.. After a while some soldiers joined the camp, Mirko was thrilled and sense a huge pride in himself, because of the soldiers, a firearm is under his control for the first time, Mirko decided with filthy arrogance to shed blood, he gave orders to attack the residence of unit seven, that was already lacking security, since those four

soldiers were sent in the first place to provide it to the unit, little they know that harm comes from those who protects... in one bloody night... the four soldiers stormed unit seven and without warning... they opened fire... killing everyone and burned the place to ground.. But regret possessed those soldiers until they were found dead after taking their own life.. They were manipulated and deceived by Mirko's mind games that this will intimidate the Kingdom and will lead them to stop sending units to this place, as mindless as it seemed but he was right, ever since this bloody incident the number of soldiers in this area started to decrease and they were only sent to this gloomy cabin.. But I was able to communicate with Strauss through here, I told him everything, and requested reinforcement, but he informed me that due the huge failure in unit seven case king Zoltan himself restricted his power, and he is only allowed to send individual and punished soldiers, and the King also warned him that if he couldn't find a solution for the North's case even with this limited potentials he will be removed from his position.. And in a month ago he informed me again that he will send the best he know, and I'm certain that you are the one.

What Eisenhower said made me puzzled, I don't know what to say nor to ask, and I don't know if he is truthful with what he said.. Eisenhower noticed my evident skepticism and said:

- You clearly seem uncertain, I know it's hard to belie..

I interrupted him saying:

- You are lying! I'm not falling into your tricks, the whole story you told is not hard to believe it's infact a big lie

Eisenhower remained silent and looked at me with an indifferent look

- You are trying to manipulate me and Strauss just like you did to unit seven, however we will not fall to the same hole again and your lies will not attract us to a setup, you are nothing then a traitor!

He kept looking at me silently... I felt I went a bit far and tried to retract what I said

- Alright, maybe I assumed too much maybe not, but regardless of my assumption how do I believe your claims?

- Don’t believe

I got confused even more by his response, I watned to say something but he kept talking:

- Don’t believe, I’m not interested to spend the next hour explaining to you how everything I said is real, but what you need to know, is that you don't have many options.. If you kill me now based on your assumption that I’m one of them, they will look for me and they will kill you.. If you cooperate with me we will devastate them and you will go back home... the choice is yours.. And whether you believe me or not means nothing for me.

His words shook my being, I felt there is no other way and said:

- What you said conducts that I’m here for a mission, however I wasn’t sent here intentionally, in fact I was accused with bribery and headquarters made a decision of sending me here as a “punished”

- So you are a punished? Didn't Strauss tell you about the mission?

- He directed me to look for missing individuals and didn’t say a word about you, he assured to me that there is survivors, and that I will find the truth through them.. However the bribery accusation is not true

- So Strauss is the one who made up this accusation...

- No, Strauss is my inspiring leader, and he helped me ever since I stepped foot in the scouting branch.. There has to be a misunderstanding or someone else is behind all that

The doctor was silent for a moment then he gave me a sharp gaze, and said:

- You can lie to others... but you can never lie to yourself.. You are trying to justify to someone who sent you to death! Haven't you noticed that he started to send only punished individuals? And why bribery specifically? Which is known that it has a defamation of the perpetrator.. He ruined your reputation there to keep you locked up here... just like he did with me so that's not out of the ordinary for him

- What are you saying? What did he do to you?

- He threatened me to expose my secret if I don’t work as a spy for him

- A spy!

- When I told that I left the unit and went into the woods, I know what I was doing and whom I’m looking for, Strauss commissioned me to join them and destroy them internally, and the moron threatened me with my secret... I couldn't refuse

- I’m speechless... Strauss... why would he do all that!

- Because he is under risk, even before the incident he received stern warnings from King Zoltan and when he sensed the risk and started to act like that.. A man’s character is easy to maintain when things are calm.. But back a man into a corner, and his morality will dissolve into pure, cold survival

- You puzzled me even more... I was never fooled before, and now this comes from the last person I would expect to do so...

Eisenhower looked at me with sympathy, sigh then and said:

- You seem a smart person Balint, and you have the potential, but you're blinded by your emotions from many things

- Our emotions are what make us human Doctor, I refuse to apologize for having them

- Right, But anything that surpasses beyond its limits becomes harmful, I’m not going to lie I wish I had it again... but it’s gone ever since she is gone...

- Gone? Who is she

- The doctor’s eyes widened realizing that he slipped of his tongue what he shouldn't.. He leaned his head aside and didn’t say a word.. I felt that I’m bothering him so I apologized and asked him to stay here considering his condition, he accepted.. Later I myself couldn’t sleep, I was thinking of his words, I try to fool myself saying maybe all he said is just delusions, lies, or misunderstanding.. Then I remember when he said that I shouldn't put my emotions first, but what if this also a trick of him? They once told me... when you be a sniper you should follow your heart, I heard that since a young age and at my first time attending the scouting branch, as if it were yesterday...

Profound Hatred

After a week of a heavy rigid trainings.. I was talking with Julian my old friend since high school.. We were talking the trainings and how tough is it, but Julian digressed to another topic, “Jaros” and how he even failed in the simplest trainings.. He said to me:

- I don’t get how someone this bad is still with us!

- He shouldn’t give up after a week only, a failure in the beginning doesn’t indicate that you fail entirely

- You don’t know him well, he is an arrogant for no reason, but at the same time he flatter everyone around him down from recruits up to officers!

- Don’t backbite him, you know him for a week only, and it’s very early to judge someone this quickly

Julian looked at me with irony and said:

- I told you he is literally doing that with everyone, in order to be everyone's friend, you have to be a man of many faces, shaping your lies to fit whoever is listening.. And he targets you with backhanded compliments and subtle insults, trying to undermine your authority without being obvious about it, he is probably jealous of you because you passed all training undisputed and everyone respects and values you with no conditions. Which is something he lacks so he fills this gap by talking bad about you.. He thinks he is outsmarting people, but I can know a rat when I see one

- I'm just wondering were you training all this time or spying at him

- Both

- Listen, you never changed, you still observe and contempt others like a little child

- Is this what I get for my concern and worry about you!

Julian got mad at me and didn't talk to me for a week.. He is a kind hearted person if you are in his good side, but at the same time he couldn't resist himself from an absolute hatred on others and

scrutinizing every little detail about them.. Perhaps Jaros is a bad person but indeed Julian is exaggerating.. Strauss used to attend trainings from time to time, he had a habit of choosing a recruit to be a leader for a week, to instill leadership spirit among us.. Every time a new leader is chosen some changes occur, since everyone wants to impose his decisions.. Once Julian was named to be the one and he intentionally humiliated Jaros.. And I was chosen as well for it for once despite not wishing for it, since I'm aware I might show tendency to the ones I prefer.. I decided not to change anything, and let everyone act freely and I guided and helped them more.. After my week as a leader is done, Strauss named me as a leader again, Strauss informed me that the leadership is earned never seized.. During the announcement I noticed the evident fury on Jaros's face, in the next period I felt that something was off, until I got an intel from Julian that Jaros is spreading rumors that that I offend him because of his "Western origins" and I label him as promising spy, that I make fun of his obesity and baldness, and worst of all that I say that the High Command is rotten to the core because someone like him is with us! I was stunned when heard that.. Why is he decribing himself with these characteristics as if he was accusing himself, I

guess the guilty one takes the hint... and despite informing the officers “Urgen” and “Pato” about these false allegations, matters gone worse as they believed those allegations and they removed me from leadership, and I was almost punished if it wasn't for Strauss.. Jaros... just like Julian said, is a very flattering to others for his own interest, even in front of me his words were so fragrant that for a moment I forget his evil side.. Later, he gained notoriety for unethical behavior, slander, and a shameless, profanity-filled way of speaking.. He didn’t have any qualifications to be here, but his convincing speech and being an influential person, having many connections, all lead him to have a high standing position.. After years we all graduated and our unit was formed and I was assigned as the unit’s captain via Strauss, the unusual thing, is when I asked for Julian to be my deputy the request was denied, and they issued that he is not “competent” enough, and they assigned that manic Jaros instead.. Julian was talking about him all the time, this time he clearly stated that he is not just corrupted, he also involved in a major corruption conspiracy occurring in the whole scout branch, and that even Strauss can’t stop this.. As a leader at that time, I had to stop Julian from such serious allegations despite believing it, there's no solid nor

tangible evidence, I also didn’t accept any kind of underestimating to Strauss.. But Julian always said... I know something that you don’t.

And now as a normal person in the middle of these cold Northern forests, and after all...Julian was indeed right.

The First Strike

We both headed east, since he woke up until we went out, he didn't speak a word, only when he asked me to follow him.. And after a while of walking and venturing into the woods I tried to break the silence and said:

- You still owe me a lot of answers

- About why I'm here and not with them, where are we going now, and what is my secret

I smiled and said:

- You are right except the final one it's your own matter

- I've reached a high rank there, and I gain full freedom to go out and scout the area, I also find people and recruit them to the rebels.. Or rather the "Rescuers" as they call themselves

- Wait a minute, you convince people to join them?! Why and who are those people?

- There are some who fled the Kingdom, criminals, or some mentally ill people, and it’s easy to convince them.. Most of them do not care about nothing of these political matters, but for a crust of bread or a swallow of water, they’ll chant whatever slogans Mirko puts in their mouths.. They aren't believers, they're just hungry.. And this is just the perfect way to eradicate them, before I joined, regardless of the fact that most of them are weak and ignorant, but they were absolutely convinced by Mirko's beliefs, and it’s very difficult to defeat someone with such a strong faith.. Mirko didn’t see all that, he just want a lot of men around him regardless of how truthful their belief in him is.. And that’s my point of recruiting those people

- I still don’t get this point

- Those who are completely convinced are hard to beat, but those who I intrude to the group are just outlaws looking for a shelter, and the moment this shelter is gone they are gone too

- I get it now, seems like you understand their beings more than them

- They are just too stupid to see it

- And what are we going to do exactly?

- We are heading to one of supplies storage, they have a whole team for hunting and storing food there.. We will destroy that place

- What's the plan?

- Halt! We have reached the place

Eisenhower bowed down and moved between bushes, I tailed him doing the same, until we saw the storage and a guard next to it, Eisenhower looked at me and whispered:

- Look, it's this guy only, and he exchanges shift with another guard in the evening, and during this exchange this place is left empty for twenty minutes, during this period we will hit the first strike!

- And what exactly are they guarding the food from!

- They are storing raw food and materials here, people there are greedy and that's why you see a guard because some food stealing incidents occurred before

- Are we staying here until dusk!?

- And what did you thought?

We stayed waiting until dusk, during this period Eisenhower told me that the "Rescuers" faked these things I've found from carcasses, unsettling symbols, to keep me intimidated and to mislead me since they are placed in an opposite direction from their camp.. They perfer to keep the punished soldier alive so he can be a witness and an approval that The North is nothing but a residence for some lunatics.. However they won't hesitate to kill me if I found the camp and it already happened to some.

At sunset... Eisenhower notified me about the guard leaving his place, he looked at me and quickly said:

- I will tail him.. Go the storage and quickly sabotage as much materials as you can.. See at the cabin in few hours if we are lucky

- I will go, only God knows what do you have on your mind but I will trust you

Eisenhower began sneaking behind the guard, I waited until he lurked from my sight.. I rushed to the storage, it was locked with a small rusty lock that I broke by my rifle, as I entered a strong stench made me disgusted, as if it was coming out of a corpse.. I poured some barrels containing meats and other substance down, I broke every breakable object as well.. Left back to the cabin after finishing in five minutes, I moved slowly and thinly so I don't leave traces behind me, after one hour I was at the cabin, but an unsettling sensation approached me, I shouldn't trust him completely... what if this is all a plan to trap me? He might comeback but... not alone... I decided to wait outside hiding among the bushes, after almost two hours I sensed something moving behind me, I immediately turned and aimed my gun at it, and it was Eisenhower standing in front of me, he said sarcastically:

- Last time you missed me.. Now this is a perfect angle to kill me

I was relieved then I look at him and said:

- It’s just a precautionary measure

He smiled faintly and said:

- Your spot is exposed, I saw you from thirty meters away.. Maybe you are a Captain in your branch, but I memorized this place like the back of my hand

- This indicates that if I memorize it along with my scouting experience I will be better

- Maybe… lets go inside there is a lot to talk about

We entered the cabin and sat to talk, I started saying:

- I have accomplished what you ask me for

- Yeah I made sure and saw it on my way back, good job

- You don’t need to make sure

Eisenhower smirked saying:

- “It’s just a precautionary measure”

- Fine, what did you do when you vanished in the dark back there?

- I killed him, strangled him to death, and then hid him in a place that never comes to mind

- You killed him?

He sat up straight, looked at me with a mocking look and said:

- Aren't you a military man? what's the weird with the word “kill” for you

- It’s different, maybe he is our enemy but killing wasn't necessary, The Kingdom itself doesn't execute the opposition.. In war we both carry weapons and we both know each other's intention, what you did wasn't combat Doctor, it was murder.. There is no honor in a knife in the dark

- The Kingdom doesn't execute the opposition, yet they imprisoned them in a dirty prison for thirty years, slowly rotting to death which is much more merciful in this case.. And here?! You are in a place where there is NO ethics nor morals in it, and if they can, they will execute you in the worst way possible

I noticed the evident wrath in his speech, I wanted to pacify the conversation, so I said:

- I understand you, spending time with them, and the fact that you are deeply aware of them, makes sense to shed their blood

- Good, don’t preach morality to me while we are standing in the mud of a forsaken forest.. Ethics are a luxury for men who aren't being hunted, tomorrow I'll pay them a visit to see how our first strike affected them, we will use the bullet in my leg for our good side, I will use it as a factor to intimidate them more, I will remove the bandage and put a rag of my clothes so it looks more realistic

- Sounds good, but what if they thought I’m behind all this?

- They believe and trust me more than their own leader, I will scare them in my way.. Put into your mind our second strike will be more bloody, be ready.

Disturbance

“We searched everywhere and no sign of him, this scumbag must be behind all this!”

Those are the words that were delivered to Mirko's ears, that were disappointing and disturbing.. Since establishing the “Rescuers” no one had the audacity to do what that guard did, he was uncomfortable, sensing and potential internal conflict.. While he was in this state, he saw his hope and his right-hand man approaching him, he smiled and welcomed Eisenhower warmly.. Before saying a word he noticed the gunshot wound in his leg, surprised, saying:

- Who did this to you! Must be that filthy soldier! Maybe he is also behind all

- No, he still hiding in his cabin like a rat, especially after he was intimidated, I was shot by an anonymous.. I fell down helpless, he could have finished me but for some reason he didn't

- They're sending a message! This isn't just one man, we're being hunted by something much larger! Perhaps outsiders stalking us or maybe internal betrayal!

- Scum? Who?

Mirko told Eisenhower about the incident, voices among the members surrounding Mirko argued, some saying that there is an internal enemy, some other start to blame outsiders, especially after seeing the doctor had been shot, such destabilization is what Eisenhower wished to see, before his arrival most of agreed that what happened is just an individual act, but after seeing the doctor arguments arose, amidst this chaos Mirko felt losing control and shouted at them to leave, he was alone with the doctor and said:

- Who could be behind all this? Who can be after us unless it’s the Kingdom itself, especially that they are armed

- This place in known for everyone in the Kingdom, isolated, no law, we are not the only one who wish for such a place.. So indeed there are other groups who

have interest in taking over the North, all odds are possible.. I heard that the Kingdom started to send criminals here as a punishment as well as an isolation

- These are bad news, we can't fight armed groups we only have seven weapons

A clear anger appeared on Mirko, stress, and lose control, all these encourages the doctor to hit another strike, he was inwardly excited to see it effect, and outwardly showing solidarity, he said:

- You mean "Six"

- WHAT!

- Haven't they informed you? A week ago one pistol was lost, I heard that from some members

Mirko's eyes bugged out of anger, and said in a tone full of wrath

- AND WHY YOU DIDN'T TELL ME!

- The one who lost it should have, I spend most of time outside and I thought that you already know

Mirko called for the camp security officer “Pavel” who in turn called for the guard responsible for it, who admitted the incident, and that he didn’t inform anyone due to his fear of punishment.. The guard was begging for mercy in a trembling, frightened tone.. Mirko remained eerily silent hearing all this begging, the raging anger inside him erupted, and a vein throbbed in his forehead.. In a sudden explosion of savagery, he drew his knife and with no hesitation slaughtered the guard in a blink of an eye, the guard fell to ground drenched in blood.. Mirko stood over his dead body, raising his hands and saying:

- This is the fate of traitors! Anyone who hides something or betray our cause becoming a puppet for the oppressive monarchy will face such fate!

The camp members start chanting for Mirko, Eisenhower stood behind watching this big crowd, he noticed that this time, .the cheers lacked their usual conviction.. The enthusiasm was brittle, replaced by a cold, creeping dread, deep down he was happy seeing the effect his first strike did, he noticed Mirko’s stress and his rush to show off in any way, and he noticed the fear in some eyes and the distrust in some other.. He planned for everything since the day

he stole the pistol from the storage, to shot himself with it just to deceive and scare them, but Balint did the job for him.. He wondered.. if the first strike had sown this much chaos, what would the second one harvest.

The Second Strike

Eisenhower came back to Balint and told him about the imbalance state he left the Rescuers in.. Both of them started planning for the second strike, Eisenhower would claim more lives still, dismissing them as “wasted” He believed their fate was sealed the moment they stepped into that dark path.. After the first strike Balint’s mind become more open to Eisenhower’s ideology, he doesn't care about shedding blood now, but crossed to his mind how to come back home after all, so he said:

- But you never addressed how we are going to go back to the Kingdom after we finish them? We will not be waiting for three months aren't we?

- We will when we finish

- And how so

- In the camp there is fuel for the generator, but it’s not worth it to steal it now.. Once we finish them we will

- At least let's keep it as a backup plan

- First of all the mission will NOT fail.. Second of all, even if you have fuel to run that device, Strauss will not allow us to come back before completing the mission, you will just hear his boring guidance for us, and he is the only one controlling that device.. I told you this before he is under risk and he is putting our lives on the edge to save his own career

it was painful for Balint to hear that about someone precious for him he sighed and said:

- Then the key for coming back is finishing them, or we die trying

The Doctor nodded in approval, Balint asked him for details so he said:

- Can you snipe?

- Sure I can but if your plan is including me directly my involvement will be exposed to them

- No, all who was sent before are not capable of sniping, so listen carefully the plan will be like this

Then he sat stright and said:

- There is a group responsible for security in the camp and they go in patrols orderly, they consist of dozens of recruits and they are armed, their leader “Pavel” the security officer the second most trusted person in the camp after me, if we manage to get rid of him and his group it will be a devastating strike that leaves the camp in anarchy.. In current circumstances I'm certain he is obsessed with patrolling around, seeking to find something to flex his muscles on.. I also don’t rule out that they might be carrying more weapons, that’s was my intention of showing them my wound, to show that their enemies now are armed, which is something they never dealt with before

Balint was listening carefully and said:

- And how we will neutralize them?

- Taking them out near the camp is not a good call, but luring them seems so.. I will rush into them shouting that I've found an enemy outpost, and then he and his group will go out immediately, and as we

approach the place, you have to snipe me, and this time intentionally

Balint was clearly surprised by what he heard and said:

- And why would I do such thing!

- Let me finish so you can understand, we must kill them all, and me staying alive will creates suspicion around me.. You must shoot me in a certain way to appear dead for them, then they will tail you until you make them fall into a trap, and I have an idea about it...

The Doctor then pointed to a specific area in his abdomen and said:

- Look, here right here there is no vital organs, but careful a slight deviation can make it fatal.. I don’t care if I die, but it will be difficult for you to finish the mission alone, and honestly I want to see their end

Balint was stunned of The Doctor cold blooded and nonchalant way he talks about his death, so he said in nettled tone:

- This is madness! You're gambling with your life for a plan that's far too reckless.. I could hit your

shoulder or your ankle, but you are asking for a death sentence

- Perfection requires risk.. Your way is predictable and predictable men get caught, I know my anatomy, Captain.. The question is, do you know your rifle?

- like the back of my hand, but you are aware that there is a margin for mistakes

- And I'm taking the risk, after that they will head to you and there take them out with the trap, I will go back to camp in that state and my severe injury will make them believe me

Eisenhower kept explaining the rest, but Balint was busy thinking is something different.. Eisenhower noticed that he is not paying attention, so he said:

- Did you even hear a word of what I said?

- How far they know this place?

- What? And why are you asking?

- I have a better plan, it will satisfy you even more, and of course It's doesn't include me attempting to kill you during it procedures

- Then, I will let you make the call this time, don’t make me regret this

- listen carefully then...

Fatal Call

In the afternoon, Pavel was patrolling around the camp along with his men equipped with all weapons left in the camp by a Mirko's decision, "It's an idiotic decision, you shouldn't put all your cards on one hand" these were the words Berkujin said to Mirko upon his decision.. Mirko responded saying:

- We must put all our power together, splitting it will encourage the enemies to strike us from different spots terminating us slowly

Berkujin glanced at Mirko dismissively, and said:

- You never been in a war before, and you know nothing about it.. Pardon me to say, but everytime I pay you a visit I see that it seems your camp is rotting, and your intellect along with it

Mirko got angry and said:

- My camp is none of your business, now tell me quickly about the status in the Kingdom and leave

Displeasure appeared on Berkujin, followed swiftly by a smile, saying coldly:

- Fine... I will not interfere in your camp's business.. But you are going to regret this later, seems that I actually extended my hand to an idiot, I should have left you rot in that dirty alley!

Berkujin stood up, turned his back and left saying:

The four-eyes guy will pluck your eyes out soon!

After a while, while Pavel was patrolling, he stopped smoking tobacco, as he was about to light it, he heard shouting from a distance, and amidst trees and bushes Eisenhower rushed into them shouting.. Pavel’s men were about to fire but Pavel signaled them not to, he stood up and as he was about to talk Eisenhower got ahead of him, his eyes widened by panic saying:

- I’ve located an enemy outpost! There are dozens of them, they could attack us at any moment!

- CALM DOWN so we can understand

- There’s no time for explanations! I heard them, they’re planning an assault at nightfall.. If we don't strike now, we are dead men walking!

Pavel was anxious, he never dealt with such a risky thing before.. He always enjoyed flexing his muscles over helpless people.. But this time... he was intimidated as he is facing a grave danger.. he decided to act outwardly the opposite of his inner self he motivated his men and ordered them to push for fighting the enemies, his men ran along with him blindly.. The Doctor stood behind the rushing group shouting:

- Where are you going? You must follow me to guide you, it’s not close

They came back and gathered around him asking him to lead the way, he signaled them to follow him.. During the way, Pavel sensed the loss of power, just like his men, he is now taking orders from The Doctor.. for knowledge, at times, is the truest form of power.. They kept walking for a long period until the sunset, and darkness took over around their surroundings.. The Doctor asked everyone to gather in one place, he took some men along with him to scout on the alleged enemy’s outpost, Pavel and the rest remained waiting for them in the same

place, an hour passed by, but no one showed up, Pavel became worried as the men around him start questioning him, he said anxiously:

- I have no clue, maybe… maybe they are still scouting, we will go back if they didn’t make it

One of his men said:

- And how exactly we do without that doctor? we've walked for three hours with many turns and paths that he only knows

- They must have been captured, we can’t do anything but fight now!

The group split in argument between those who wants to flee and who wants to fight.. Pavel lost control over them, despite his constant shouting, and ordering them to stop.. Until a gunshot from far away interrupted this dispute, followed by other four gunshots.. Pavel realized something and said:

- The amount of shots matches them! They were five men and we just heard five shots!

Pavel said those words while moving backward out of fear, and his men start to do the same realizing that they're facing something that's beyond their

limits, as if an invisible predator was stalking them from the shadows, picking them off one by one.. Desperate it is... Pavel signaled his men to evacuate, as they were about to, a bullet lodged in the head of one of Pavel's men, landing him dead instantly, they immediately panicked, and scattered between those who went to the gunshot direction, and those who fled to the unknown

After few days of disorientation, Pavel's men were neutralized one after the other, taking them out was an easy task due to their dispersion.. Finally Pavel was the sole survivor, running through the forest towards the unknown, he tried by all means to go back to the camp but in fact he was getting lost more.. At the request of Eisenhower, Balint shot Pavel, causing him a harsh yet not fatal wound, enough to make him suffer.. Fell to the ground screaming in pain... and hopelessness.. Balint along with The Doctor were watching from distance, Balint was aiming his rifle on Pavel ready to take him out.. He said:

- Let me pull this trigger and finish it, it took more time then it should, and I'm certain that Mirko has noticed their disappearance and yours too

- I don’t care, I want to see this scumbag dies slowly, very slowly, I want to enjoy each second this filthy pig suffers in

- Now you are the one putting his emotions first, the rational decision is pulling this trigger

Balint prepared to shoot, but The Doctor put his hand on the trigger preventing him, looked at Balint a stern look saying:

- I’m just giving him a taste of his own medicine, this is justice not emotions

The Doctor lowered his hand, looked at Pavel’s direction.. Sighed and said:

- As I told you before, criminals and mentally ill people came here, most criminals join us, as for psychotic ones... they are worthless, and that lunatic enjoyed torturing and killing them, he used to play hide and seek with them... let them go in the forest, and chase after them, once he finds them, he either kill or torture his unlucky victim to death.. He must be recalling each one of them now, that's if he has a living conscience in the first place.. Poor lady... I will never forget...she was hallucinating with

terrifying things and she was talking about it, that filthy pig made her hallucinations real...

Balint was sad of what he heard, accompanied with huge hatred to that person, that started shouting hoarsely for help

- I understand your point now

The Doctor looked at Balint smiling and said:

- Great, that’s what matters for me.. And don’t worry we will finish him now by what both satisfies and finish things fast

Both of them headed to him.. And the moment Pavel glanced The Doctor and recognized him, he gathered himself and tried to stand up, while saying:

- Eisen... Eisenhower you are alive! Please I’m thirsty I need wat...

And in a blink of an eye Eisenhower took out a gun and shot him right at the head.. Balint was puzzled saying:

- Didn't you want to torture him?

- And so I did

- How so?

- You see, he was about to die but when he saw me, hope regenerated for him and got up eagerly, but that hope was his death, There is no greater cruelty than giving a dying man hope, only to snatch it away.. He died in a state of utter confusion, that is the pure form of punishment

- If only he didn't deserve this I call you mad.. We may punish our enemies but not with their methods, now we are no different, or maybe worse

- I am, the problem is not with madness itself, but it’s with whom you apply this madness on.. If you in war, there are some war ethics, however here they don't exist, they are insane, and only a matching madness can face them.

Alone Again

Tensions rose in the camp, Mirko was confused amid the alarming disappearance of Pavel.. Berkujin words crossed his mind and felt an immense regret, He alerted him of the newcomers, on top of them, “Eisenhower”, he believed that welcoming a lot of new members will lead to termination in the end, as for him, the aim is not quantity but rather quality.. “you shouldn't put all your cards in one hand” “you are going to regret this later”, these words,thoughts were crossing his mind, growing more anxiousness and sorrow.. He sensed an imminent danger.. The possibility of losing Pavel and all arms is a certain death upon them indeed, not just due to the loss itself, but the causing for the loss of all this power, surely is more powerful.. Is it Kingdom? Or another group just like Eisenhower had claimed, Is it Eisenhower himself!? Perhaps an internal betrayal.. These obsessions were tormenting him inwardly, and they were interrupted by one of the guard's shouting rushing towards him:

- corpse corpse there's a corpse for one of Pavel's men!

everyone gathered around the guard in panic, Mirko pushed away everyone in front him and headed to the guard.. Grabbed him by his neck and said angrily:

- A corpse! What are saying you liar!

- Sir I swear to you, there is even a corpse in message! I mean a message a message in the corpse!

the intimidated guard pulled out the message and handed it to Mirko with shaking hands.. Mirko grabbed the message and read the following:

“We have captured one of your groups that tried to interfere with our territory. YOU MUST KNOW THAT YOUR PRESENCE IS NOT WELCOME. You have one day to evacuate, otherwise all prisoners will be executed and you will be next.”

Mirko rubbed the paper and threw it on the ground Steaming with frustration.. But one of the camp members noticed that there is something written on the back of it, he lifted it and told Mirko.. He took a look at it, it turns out that it had the names of each prisoner including Eisenhower, and underneath it was a map sketch, with a waypoint on a certain spot, below it, was coordinates for the spot and phrase “For extra details”

Everyone surrounding Mirko were settled up awaiting his orders.. He start to give them one of his speeches, but this time, the evident anxious and indifferent appeared in their reaction, they realize they are facing an armed group while carrying sticks and knives.. Mirko heard some whispers calling to evacuate the place and go back to the Kingdom.. He got frustrated from being overlooked of the others, and in contrast to his speech, they planned to escape.. Mirko requested Gathering especially for the unassured ones.. He ordered a group to pay the punished soldier a visit, to kill him, and take over his weapon and supplies.. And another group to go to the given coordinates and to be cautious there.. The commissioned members refused the order, Mirko was stunned as such disobedience never occurred before, desite his anger, he calmly

convinced them that the coordinates is related to a potential negotiation site.. Finally they agreed to go hesitantly.. Mirko went back to his tent, carrying more grief, what he fears the most had happened.. He sensed how irrational and urgent his decisions were, he just wanted any kind of a reaction, also to get rid of the members that lacked trust, in an attempt to reduce tensions the camp.. But now... he start to consider all odds.. Escape is not a disqualified option anymore, the Kingdom might consider him as a mad person not an opposition leader.. But is he going to compromise all from the first setback? Shouldn't men sacrifice for their cause? But was he faithful to his beliefs? That never reflected in his acts.. Maybe his issue with the king is not his authoritarian and tyranny, but it’s that the king has preceded him to the throne!.. Berkujin... seems that he has abandoned him too, seeking help from him is not an option.. Ever since Eisenhower began to recurit a lot of men to the camp, Berkujin no longer concerned Mirko, and Berkujin himself stopped sharing intel to Mirko, only when he informed him that he have established a secret organization consisting of prestigious individuals in the middel of the Kingdom, but Mirko couldn't care less.. He even started condescending over Berkujin confiding in his might.. He thought that

his advices stems from envy and jealousy.. He realized that his arrogance and pride led him to his current state.. He remained in his tent isolating himself from everything, waiting for whatever is coming

On the other hand, Balint and Eisenhower were proning on the ground, watching intently the place they gave it coordinates in the message.. Balint said:

- You sure this is going to work?

- Yes

- Still, it doesn't make sense for someone receiving a threat to follow some random coordinates in it

- Logic is a foreign language to a mind like Mirko's.. He reacts to fear, not reason, they are more foolish they you think.. You are used to face your equal, and those you should make a smart trap for them, but the stupid one should get what suits him

- You mean a stupid trap

- What matters is you treat your enemy based on his intelligence not yours

Then he continues saying:

- Also... they might cling to any means of hope, perhaps they would consider this place as a meeting for negotiations

- Do you expect them to evacuate today?

- No

- Then what’s the point of the message?

- Some of them might.. Some may stay for a final fight.. And some will stand puzzled between both sides, and this all will lead to our goal, anarchy

After a few minutes, the commissioned group showed up.. Began examining and found a hole, as they looked at it they found out that Pavel’s lifeless body lays down of it.. Three men went down to retrieve the body, they lifted it up, but after few seconds the body exploded at them! Killing half of them and wounding the other half severely, they ran away terrified abandoning their men's bodies behind them.. The only grenade Balint had used it as the trap, as they lifted the body, A tripwire, hidden

beneath Pavel’s cold weight, pulled the pin caused the grenade to explode.. Eisenhower glanced Balint with a smile, both of them went back to cabin.. But they were shocked finding another group there! Balint said:

- What are they doing here!

- I didn't expect that maybe what we did went beyond our expectation, Mirko is pushing all he can

- They are raiding the cabin, they must be here for me

- They aim for your weapon, previously this is what Mirko did in order to get them, he must have turned back to his old games

- And what now?

- We'll wait for them then we'll see.. Mirko must be thinking you are part of this, and me as well, I don’t think including my name in that list would help anyway.. So no coming back to them, plan has changed!

Then Balint looked at Eisenhower questioning and asked:

- Firearms in your bag is it?

- Certainly

- I have a plan, we'll wait for them to leave...

Both of them waited until the group had left.. They began to track them.. They both hide in a spot when where they remain unseen.. And when the right moment arrived, they open a hail of bullets on the group.. They intentionally let someone live, which as expected ran away as fast as he can, as he did so they chased him shouting out loud and mass shooting.. They halted at one point, Balint looked at Eisenhower and said:

- Great! The plan incredibly succeeded, God knows what a kind of tale he is going to scare the "camp" with

- Now let's go take a close look at the art we just created!

In the evening, Mirko went out of his tent, he was on pins and needles awaiting news of either group he had sent.. He noticed the prevailing silent in the camp, he barely saw anyone, he starts to call out for whoever he glimpse to stay around him, in order to feel safe.. After a while, the first group came back

drenched in their blood.. They informed Mirko what had occurred, everyone started to gasp and shout in fear.. And for the first time, Mirko stood calm, he is not interested to control this time, realizing that his word are more worthless now.. His calls led to this, he couldn't help himself to move on of this incident only for the shoutings of the sole survival of the second group being heard all over the camp, portending more bad omen.. The frightened sole survival told about dozens of "unseen" soldiers that ambushed them, killing every single one of them, and about the "demonic" cries he heard chasing him while escaping.. A huge dispute happens, different voices arose radically, then everyone began to act chaotically to meet their demands.. Amid this anarchy Mirko stood watching silently, seeing everyone around him running for themselves, and only very few members came close to him awaiting his orders.. He just looked at them, turned his back and went to his tent, sat on his chair, bowed his head, covered his face with both hands, hearing the frightened and disturbed voices outside.. After few seconds he realized... that it's over, death is surrounding him.. And those men outside are no longer his puppets, but rather humans who wants to survive by any mean, and when a human is acting so... even close ones are dangerous.. He is also like

that, he also wants to survive, fading with no coming back.. He would even wish for an asylum rather than staying here.. He couldn't care less now about monarchy, freedom, nor “Westerns” , he just care about his life.. He took a pistol he was hiding.. Got out of the tent to find out chaos swept all around the camp.. With the absence of security Pavel previously provided, the camp members were raiding each others supplies savagely, and few of them fighting back for it.. Amidst this chaotic situation, Mirko sneaked out of the camp, once he felt that he is certainly out of their vision, he began to run as fast as he can.. And all that is happening under the surveillance of Balint and Eisenhower

The bright of a new day, illuminated the Rescuers camp, some tents are burned to the ground, and silence prevailed the place.. Nothing is left except for the lifeless bodies that were killed in this anarchy.. Several kilometers away, he was running alone between the trees, he still sense danger from behind, from those that were on his side and now became his enemies.. And the danger of the outsiders.. He was heading south hoping to reach road “201” the only avenue that heads from the

Kingdom to the North.. He halted catching his breath, he's been on the run for several hours.. he sat leaning on a tree, he began to remember his days in the Kingdom, he recalled his massive wish to have a normal life.. He just had engaged with the love of his life, and he was filthy rich, as being responsible for his father's tradings and markets after he had gotten old.. But the fire that took away all his family and money, cause him a severe mental problems.. At the same time his fiancé began to ignore and abandoning him in such a harsh period.. When he tried to approach her, she confessed, with cold honesty, that she had no room in her life for a man who had lost both his fortune and his mind.. He tried to change, he went out seeking a job, his markets now worth nothing without a capital, his markets quickly ran out of stock, forcing him to lay workers off and shut down his stores.. He seeked for any work opportunities, but he was rejected repeatedly, he was only accepted in illegal acts.. He went to join the army and got rejected because of his height.. After a while his fiancé completely left him, and threatened him that if he tries to come close to her again, she will tip the government that he's a Westerns spy.. He came to a conclusion at that moment that even the most person he ever loved is no different from anyone else, treating him

based on his Westerner origins, and perhaps she haven't approached him in the first place only for his wealth, in fact all his race are infamous for being wealthy, and the most people despise them and consider them as spies to the Westerns due to their origins, Ever since a young age he was fulfilled with hatred progressively, but he was trying his best to be patient and reflecting a good image of himself.. Even responding to harmness with kindness.. He was forced sometimes to hide his name to not expose his origins.. Until he reached college, he endured a lot of insults and contempt for the sake of reflecting that good image... unlike his colleagues that share the same blood with him, as they have adopted an offensive Style to protect themselves, they also don’t make any kind of relationships with other races to ward away problems.. He was the only one trying to get close to everyone.. One day a girl approached him, Mirko fell in love with her instantly, as he never experienced being loved Before.. Despite his friends and family alerting him that she is just coveting his wealth.. Contrary to what they said, he went and engaged with her instantly to defy them.. After this disappointment, his heart completely fulfilled with hatred on everyone, and on the Kingdom system, that that as he regarded oppressing and taking revenge of them

because of what the Westerns did in the past.. especially that the police report stated that the fire incident that occurred in his house was intentional and it was registered against unknown defendant.. This was told to him in the police station when he went to get his compensation, they informed him that he is not included and whoever caused the fire should be responsible.. No one offerd a helping hand to him at that time, until Berkujin did so, he saw him ever since being rejected in the army.. He kept tailing him and gathered his information and know his story.. Until he reached to him and told him that he needs someone like him, and that together they will take down the oppressive monarchy.. And take his family vengeance and their own too.. This offer is more than Mirko can wish for, a helping hand after an intense hit, and a new hope after a deep fall, a reason to live for.. And now after years of establishing the Rescuers, it had come to an end, and Berkujin left him behind.. Mirko couldn't take it, and cried as much as he did when he lost everything, at that time, Berkujin offerd his hand, but now Eisenhower is offering his rifle!

Eisenhower smirked saying:

- I didn’t know that tears can come out of such a person like you

Mirko got shocked and said:

- TRAITOR! I WILL KILL YOU!

Mirko stepped forward taking his gun out, but before he can do anything, Balint struck him with his rifle.. He fell to the ground, blood pouring out of his head, his gun fell in front of him, he went on his knees and tried to reach out for his gun, Eisenhower was ahead of him and kicked him on his head again.. He fell on his back, both of them approached him, pointing their guns at him, Eisenhower said:

- It’s over dwarf, you don’t know how good is it to see an arrogant end up this humiliated

Mirko raised his head, coughing blood out of his mouth, saying:

You rat! Berkujin told me.. I should have killed you and him and all those traitors you brought! Just like you betrayed your Kingdom, you betrayed us and became a puppet to someone else

Then Mirko looked at Balint and and continued saying while laughing:

- He will betrays you, just like he did to me.. One day you will be in my place.. Kill him! Kill him while you still can

Eisnhower laughed, Balint smirked saying:

- We are no group or such thing.. I am the punished soldier

Balint pulled out his Identification saying:

- The group you took years to make... terminated by our hands.. What a pity

Mirko eyes widened, then said:

- You're a liar, you will not manipulate me, not again

Eisenhower recalled the name “Berkujin” that didn’t sound familiar to him.. He stepped forward to Mirko and grabbed his neck saying:

- Tell me and I'll give a merciful death.. Who is Berkujin? Talk, there nothing worth to hide now

He laughed and said sarcastically:

- Maybe you got me, and maybe that filthy scum abandoned me.. But he is my hope to wipe out your Kingdom, and stomp on your dirty heads one day

Eisenhower was riled up, and started punching Mirko's face repeatedly, shouting:

- TALK! SAY WHO HE IS! Or I will make beg for your own death!

And he kept beating him, and wasn't going to stop if it wasn't for Balint.. At this moment, Mirko raised his head again struggling.. Looked at Eisenhower and his facial features are distorted due the severe beating.. He laughed and said spluttering:

- You are insane, perhaps you count yourself as a hero but you are insane.. You were with us and we both committed the same dirty acts.. You are no different from me, you are even worse.. You killed your own wife! What an idiot she was marrying someone like you!

The Doctor eyes widened in anger.. Balint was keeping his grip on him, but suddenly Eisenhower pushed him furiously to the ground, and pounced on Mirko taking out his knife.. He stabbed him to death, but that wasn't enough as he continued stabbing him, until his clothes and face soaked in blood.. All that is happening while Balint laying on the ground watching.. Eisenhower kept doing this until he collapsed on the ground too.. Balint stood up, and

took few steps closer to him and looked at him.. He was crying in a shivering low voice.. He gave him a hand standing up, afterwards, both were walking back to the cabin silently, Balint glanced at Eisenhower multiple times seeking to break that silence.. But his indifferent looking covered with dried blood stains, didn't encourage Balint to start a conversation.. But Eisenhower himself started it saying:

- I know you have a lot of questions, and I know you consider me no different from him, maybe I'm worse like he said

- Don't you dare put yourself in his category.. You're my friend, and you're the man who saved my life.. What you did today was a service to the Kingdom, no matter how it feels you've accomplished something the Kingdom itself couldn't

Eisenhower remained silent for a while then said:

- I.. I killed her! I am the reason!

Balint was speechless, Eisenhower continued saying:

- I will tell you everything... it's the right time for it...

Surgical Error

I started to work as a military doctor, I was assigned like that.. I didn’t ask for a redeployment later because I myself wanted it, despite the high salary, the fact that I can learn how to use a gun, and some certain military skills was interesting for me.. Everything was alright until that one day... my wife was gravely ill.. She was everything for me, I lived a harsh, unstable life, and I only found that joy and stability with her.. time went by.. It turns out later the she needs an urgent serious heart surgery.. I’ve applied to be the one doing that surgery, but my application was rejected arguing the need for doctors in the army.. And that I can only transfer to the civil section after six month, but my wife needed that surgery in one month.. I had information not allowed to disclose, half of the patients who go through this surgery, died due to the lack of efficient doctors in the Kingdom.. The Kingdom distribute the skilled and efficient doctors especially surgeons on the fronts, prioritizing them to the army.. I couldn't

take it, I decided to bribe the officials to make me the one responsible for her surgery, and it worked.. And on the day of it, while I was doing it, I made a humongous mistake... I tried so hard to save her, and I did each procedure for such emergent case.. I found myself repeating procedures that should only be performed once, performing them dozens of times in a frantic, hopeless loop, refusing to accept she was gone.. Nurses around me left me after desperate attempts to make me stop.. And I was still trying with hope... but nothing... her heart had already stopped beating half hour ago.. I realized the grim reality.. I killed her! The head of Military Medical department found out.. I was called for his office, I went there but I was devastated.. He noticed that, and told me that I can stay home for a few days, but the results of the investigations, will not be on my side.. I couldn't care less.. I went back home, feeling shrouded by darkness.. I tried to escape to sleep, oh I see there the vilest of nightmares, I wake up from it to live a worse reality.. Tears didn't reduce my pain, they rather increase it, my cries were helpless.. When I start to move on... I realized the risk and the punishment upcoming to me, my fate is to spend the rest of my life in jail, and defamation.. What will be written in newspapers about me? He paid a bribe to kill his wife! Am I going to be

executed? Perhaps death is more honorable than living servilely.. Perhaps death is my fate.. I was waiting at home, until I received a message from the official saying:

“Maybe we can sort your problem, but it requires some sacrificing.. Go to this address”

I went to the included address, it was a house, knocked the door, and an old man opened it.. He welcomed me warmly as if he knows me, and said to me:

- Doctor Eisenhower isn’t?

- Yes, yes I’m him

- Welcome, I was worried that you get captured before arriving here, welcome in

I went inside and sat with him.. He introduced himself as “Colonel Strauss” the head of Scouting Branch.. I asked him confused why would he wants to meet me, he answered:

- Actually, I heard about you from a friend, and when I heard your story, I felt saddened that such an

acclaimed and efficient doctor with a clean record.. end up into that unfortunate mistake.. And you know, we all make mistakes, and you made it for someone you love, not for your own interest or desire.. You sacrifice for others, and if I were you, I would do the same.. But unfortunately it will remain a crime in the Kingdom perspective, and they will punish you for it, but every problem has a solution.. You must understand, Doctor some sins can only be washed away with more blood.. I'm giving you a chance to turn a tragedy into a service for the Crown.. I'll get you out of it, I can make that report say that the patient died due to complications, and of course I will change the doctor's name.. All that will be done by my friend easily

I was speechless for a while analyzing his words in my scattered mind, then I said:

- And what a kind of a "Crown Service" do you want?

- I need a certain thing

- What is this "certian thing"?

- In the North, you know the situation there, a lot of gossips.. Almost everyone goes there make up a lot of nonsense.. But our latest intel, tells that

everything there is run by an opposition secret group.. That hides under the pretext that they are a satanic cult, these are solid information, but there is no concrete evidence acceptable to the Kingdom to take serious procedures upon them.. To be more honest, the King himself and headquarters had enough of this case.. And they are awaiting any misstep to punish me.. So I have to devastate that group quick, and to devastate a secret group you must use special ways.. I will send you with a large unit that will not have a single soldier initially, to make your mission flexible.. Then I want you to abandon that unit, and join the secret group, tell them your story and what you did.. Then, they will trust you, they will really believe that you are a dissident.. Once you earn their trust, I want you to know everything about them, and where they are settling up.. Inform me about all that, through a secret cabin that I will attach a communication device in.. And when the right time arrives, I will send a special unit consist of the best of my men, and with their help, you will neutralize them.. I heard a good report about you, they say you are great at memorizing routes and direction and you don't use a map, and you can use a gun really well

I got furious and interrupted him:

- SHUT UP! You want to use me as a spy for your own benefit.. What's the difference between the North and execution?

- I'm not using you, we are exchanging interests

- Call it whatever you want! I will not let you twist what happened to my wife to control me, you vile pig!

His sympathetic expression hardened into anger.. He stood, walked to the door, opened it, and said:

- You can leave, but for the record.. You said what is the difference... the difference is that I will make sure you rot in prison, and you will get defamed.. And this is a tough sentence but it suits you well.. I will make sure you never get released under no circumstances.. Not even a royal pardon! And your disgraceful reputation will haunt you all your life, that you will spend behind the bars.. Or you can accept, even if you think going there is a fatal fate, it will be nothing compare to what's going to happen to you if you walked through this door rejecting.. You are free to do what you want!

I couldn't stand his provoking words, I smacked the table in front of me.. Then I stood up walked towrds

him willing to smash his face, but he got ahead of me and pointed his gun at me.. I froze in my place, both of us gazing at each other silently.. then suddenly he turned his gun to his face, and handed it to me.. I grabbed it hesitantly, I wanted to kill him just a moment ago, now I'm not sure, It isn't the same.. He said:

- You can even kill me, but it will only make things more complicated.. They'll accuse you of "betrayal" and pin their failures on you... They will claim that they captured a spy that killed a "Colonel", and in reality you killed me just for a tantrum.. Eisenhower... sending you there is the perfect solution anyway.. You have no one left here, you have nothing meaningful or worth to give anymore, going there will open new paths for you.. It will solve yours and mine and even the Kingdom's problems! Instead of being treated as a corrupt, you will be a hero.. The choice is yours, you can leave as well, and don't worry, I won't harm you beyond what you've already done to yourself.. I am offering you the only solution that exists.

I couldn't pull the trigger, it was really meaningless.. I lowered the gun, handed it to him.. Shaked his hand.. And we agreed on all terms.. I felt it's the only

way.. Probably the best one for me.. But now after all... I don’t feel nothing, I don’t know what I should come back for.. I spent years looking for an enemy to blame, but in the end, the only monster in the room was me

Balint empathized with Eisenhower, then said:

- You said that he wanted to send the best among his men?

- Yes, but as I told you the incident that occurred restricted him.. Rescuers failed generally, but they only managed to convince the Kingdom that they are just some maniacs roaming around, or mostly a satanic cult isolating itself here.. And these are all matters considered “silly” for the Kingdom, and they take it as a waste of time and soldiers.. That’s why they wanted any slip of Strauss who prioritize this case over the war with the Westerners

- I think it all makes sense for me now, Strauss sent me here because he already planned to do so, but the restriction made him sending me here punished and alone.. I don't mind being commissioned officially and honorably.. But... But accusing me with something that I didn't do just to send me here, is

not acceptable... why didn’t he tell me when he had the chance!?

- I told you, he did everything for himself only

- And who is that “Berkujin” ?

- That’s what I don’t know

- Who he can be? What is his role of all this

- He could be one of Mirko’s partners or something.. He said he is his hope to devastate us, perhaps it’s not over then.. Maybe in another territory

- Inside the Kingdom?

- That’s difficult, traveling between the Kingdom and the North is complicated especially without a car.. I have no clue

- Forget about it, lets go get the gas and leave this fateful place

- When we communicate with Strauss don't mention the accusation, when we go back we will discuss this with that old man

- we’ll see...

Both of them went to the place Eisenhower had previously hidden gas in it, they took it to the cabin, and turned on the generator.. after a long wait, the lights came on, and hope that was lost had returned.. They turned on the device full of hope to hear Strauss's voice.. Balint start talking:

- Balint here, North sector, do you copy?

But no response came, Balint repeat what he said unti he heard a signal sound followed by a phrase:

- I do, I do copy!, Colonel Strauss here, the Capital

- Colonel, the operation in the Northern sector has been accomplished, and the risk has been ceased entirely

- Roger that! These are magnificent news! please report any further details, and have you meet survivors?

Eisenhower stepped in, and interrupted the call, casting military protocol aside:

- Strauss, me and Balint destroyed them and it's over send someone to take us we had enough of this gloomy forest.. We will inform you with details

in the Kingdom, I can bring their leader's head if it wasn't distorted

- Eisenhower! I’m pleased to hear you, roger that, a driver will be sent to evacuate you, details will be discussed upon your arrival

Balint said:

- Is my wife fine?

- Yes don’t worry about her, she wanted to send a message to you but as you're aware we couldn't deliver it

- She must be concerned, please reassure her about me

- Don’t worry, I will make sure of that as soon as possible, Colonel Strauss, over

Strauss shut down the device and went and sat on his desk, he was relieved, as he was on the edge of a severe punishment, and nothing could have save him unless for the North case to be done, now it is..The opposition is wiped out.. His “genius” plan went well.. The report that he is going to give surely will be impressive to headquarters, as he neutralized an imminent danger despite the low

capabilities.. And all that time, he was right about his concern.. But he recalled Balint’s words... and felt puzzled and sorrow... he thought to himself saying:

How I'll tell him about his wife...!

Tyranny

After she received the news of the lost connections of her husband, and despite of Strauss's reassurance that these issues are normal due to several factors, she was uneasy.. Especially that Strauss refused to send any backup "due to his inability" as he put it.. Regardless of her grief on her husband, she decided to occupy herself as much as she can.. After the brutal bombing on the children's hospital that she worked in, she was out of work until she get reemployment in another place.. During this period, she was allowed to work from her home urgently, on the condition that her work is voluntary.. She accepted indifferently, since she already helped families incapable of paying for treatment.. She spent the following weeks in this exhausting routine, waking up in the morning and taking care of patients until midnight.. Even sometimes staying up all night overseeing some cases that require constant monitoring.. She started hiring some nurses she knew previously and paid

them.. Her house turned into something like an emergency clinic, and the door is never shut.. The most difficult cases she had to deal with is children that survived the bombing, as some of were in a critical condition, and there is no chance of survival.. Despite that she provided them the best she can of care and compassion.. One day, she woke up to the door being knocked intensely, she was expecting it to be one of the patient's families or something relevant.. Or little chance it is... her husband.. She opened it and found three men in front of her in military uniform, the one in the middle looks familiar to her, as he was wearing a uniform similar to what her husband wears.. Before she can say a word, he said to her:

- You are the corrupt wife, aren't you?

Anett was shocked of the way he talked to her.. She didn't respond and simply gave him an anger gesture.. He said provocatively:

- I said are you the corrupt’s wife?

- Yes I’m the Captain's wife

- You have no right to address him that way.. He is now nothing more than a corrupt servant, assuming he is not already dead.

- Get to the point, what do you want?

- I am Jaros the undisputed Captain of the Scouting Branch, leader of the unit that suffered under that filthy, corrupt tyrant

She fed up listing to him.. all she heard about him form husband that he was unqualified and filthy.. Now he stood in front of her, in the same position and uniform her husband once held, and he was nothing like him.

- And what do you want “Jaros” ?

- If you weren't that good looking, I wouldn't let that slide.. Because naming a officer without mentioning his rank is a crime, but I will ignore for that beautiful face I see

She was stunned by his insolence and audacity, she replied:

- Excuse me!?

- Now look, we are here to seize this property.. We need it as an outpost, the Crown has the right to seize the assets of those convicted of high crimes.. This house is no longer yours, it belongs to the Scouting Branch

- What are you saying? And where would I go! And this house is a shelter for ill and wounded children

She opened the door completely showing the children to him, saying angrily:

- Do you see them? Those are the ones you fight for if you consider yourself a true one.. Those are survivors of the Hospital bombing.. Please whatever the matter you need this house for, it won't matter more than those helpless children.. Ask all the neighborhood, I use this house to treat those children

Jaros stood silent for a while, then took a paper out, he wrote something in it, and handed it to the officer next to him saying in cold blood:

- File a new report.. This isn't just a home it’s an unlicensed medical facility.. Add “operating without a permit” to her list of crimes

He looked at her and continued saying in a provoking tone:

- Anyway, you have one day to vacate the house.. And also, it is really upsetting that a lady this beautiful like you be a married to a corrupted man.. You asked, “Where would I go?” Then you’re in luck I’ve been searching for a wife for a long time.. We’ll continue this discussion tomorrow.. And spare the fake refusal, darling

Then he winked and said

- See you tomorrow

After he left, she was left speechless.. She heard that he insufferable but not this far bad.. She thought to herself furiously:

- Who does this pig think he is to talk to me this way!?

During the day, she seemed not well to those around her, anxiety and anger were evident on her.. She felt powerless thinking of solution.. She didn't even consider relying on Strauss, as she sensed how useless he was last time.. It is intense to lose her home in such a way, also depriving these children of a shelter, a growing rage gradually

increased as she thinks about it.. She waited until next day morning, no one yet showed up, she hoped that they forgot about it, or perhaps their ruthless hearts sympathized the situation.. Little did she know that her hopes will vanish, as she saw from the window Jaros coming from far away, along with many men.. He entered and started shouting at the nurses to leave.. Then he went outside and shouted loudly making everyone around hears him:

- Anett! Go out now and clear the house or we do it by force

Then he said laughing:

- And don’t worry my offer is still there!

Anett was overwhelmingly provoked, she couldn’t bear it, but she decided to take the difficult way, tough it was... but it’s the only.. After few minutes, she went down, and opened the door.. Jaros looked at her and said:

- Don’t worry darling, I have a house ready for you.. Don't worry you can easily get divorced from your husband due to his case, and maybe we don't necessarily need that!

Jaros stepped closer to her, smiling arrogantly.. He took his hand out of his pocket to shake her hand .. And Anett took her hand out pulling out a gun.. And shot Jaros, but it wasn't fatal due to her lack of experience.. The officers rushed into Anett to stop her, but the gathered people stood in between protecting her.. But when they threated to open fire, Anett asked everyone to go, and turned herself to them preventing a bloodshed.. They dragged her away as the neighborhood were chanting supporting, their shouts for justice drowning out the military's commands.. Anett was charged with attempted murder to a military man, which could lead to execution!

The Farm

Balint and Eisenhower were on their way back along with the driver “Franz”.. He was chattering all the way cheerfully, glad that the North case is over.. He said:

- Man you did me a favor I'll never forget in my life.. No more escorting lunatics to that wretched forest

Balint pointed at Eisenhower saying:

- He is the one to thank, if it wasn’t for him we won’t be back

- I'm afraid I haven't had the honor meeting you sir.. Were you a soldier there? I don’t recall taking you before

Eisenhower replied indifferently:

- Just do your job and don't talk too much

Balint noticed Franz got embarrassed of that rude reply.. So he said:

- Don’t mind us, we've been through a lot

- It’s alright, I just wanted to... forget it

Franz kept driving until the features of the Kingdom started to appear again.. Villages, towns on the side of the road, several checkpoints.. And after two hours they reached their destination.. But just before they are about to enter the Kingdom.. Franz took a strange turn.. Initially Balint didn’t think about it assuming it was a shortcut.. But as the familiar landmarks of the capital faded into overgrown paths.. suspicion rose in Balint he was about to talk but Eisenhower was a step ahead and said:

- This is not the right way.. Where are you taking us!?

Franz replied stuttering:

- I forgot to say, Colonel Strauss asked me to bring you to a nearby farm here.. He told me to inform you once we get close

Eisenhower didn’t waste a second and took a gun out pointing it at Franz’s head.. And shouted looking at Balint:

He is luring us into a set up! That old moron wants to get rid of us after we’ve done! He’s terrified we’ll expose his dirty laundry! He used us to clear his mess, and now he wants us under the ground

- Sir I swear I don’t know a word of what you’ve said! I’m just doing my jo...

- SHUT UP! Don’t you open your mouth or I’ll empty it in your head!

Balint interfered saying:

- STOP! Even if you're right franz is out of this.. We can deal with it even if he wants to kill us like you said!

- And how exactly we are going to “deal with this” !? Do you expect me to go to that farm like an idiot!? So he can bury me there

Balint gazed at Franz and said:

- Tell me what exactly Strauss have told you

- He said that he will personally meet you there, to talk about a special affair away out of sight

Eisenhower said:

- “out of sight” so he can kill us conveniently!

Balint looked at Eisenhower and said:

- We will go, but we will take Franz as a hostage.. And if we sense any danger we'll take him out.. But we must know what’s on Strauss’s mind.. Because it could be something that matters

Balint glanced at Franz winking.. Eisenhower reluctantly agreed on this proposal.. Franz drove them under threat until reaching the old farm.. As they’ve arrived, Balint recalled it, this farm is Strauss’s.. They stepped out of the vehicle, while Eisenhower is grabbing Franz tightly.. He pointed the gun at him shouting around:

- STRAUSS! STRAUSS, come out and face us like a man for once! You’re not getting us here.. COME OUT OR ELSE!!

Until Strauss came out rushing from the house, saying:

- What are doing? Why are you pointing a gun into the man’s head?

Eisenhower let go of Franz, and headed to Strauss gazing him furiously.. And said:

- Why are you dragging us into THIS FARM AT THIS TIME!? Say it, say that you want to eliminate us after our use is over

- Eisenhower... if I wanted to do this I could’ve done it in the North

- LIAR! You can’t send nothing to North, you couldn't even send any backup when you lost communication with me.. you left me! You left me to die! Even when you sent Balint, you didn't send any gas with him and.. You wanted to lock us there so we don’t have a choice but finishing it! I have had enough of your lies and manipulations!

- Eisenhower.. You must listen, I want to inform you about something related to the whole mission.. The part we didn’t finish yet

- The part we didn’t finish yet is killing us off! Do it! Do it now and don’t make it long because I have no energy left for your gossip

Balint came close standing between both and said:

- Colonel, tell me what is it?

Before Strauss can say a word, Eisenhower looked at Balint and said sarcastically:

- “Colonel tell me what is it” AFTER EVERYTHING HE DID TO YOU!? after he sent you to death and accused you with bribery.. You came here to call him Colonel, you are worse than him!

- Eisenhower, calm down so we can understand

- Oh you won't understand nothing from that filthy backstabbing old man

Then Strauss said looking at both:

- It's about your wife

Eisenhower burst a blood vessel, and headed to Strauss grabbed his neck and choked him saying:

- My wife is dead you filthy pig, DON’T YOU EVER MENTION HER AGAIN OR I WILL RIP YOU INTO PIECES!!

Balint separated them, Eisenhower didn't release his grip until he throw Strauss on the ground..

Strauss stood up.. Took his hat up wearing it.. He took a deep breath and said to Eisenhower, who was barely grabbed by Balint:

- Not yours, Balint's.. His wife might get executed if we don't act quick

After hearing his words Balint's eyes widened, Strauss's words striking him like a sudden blow.. He stood frozen, unable to comprehend what he had heard.. Even Eisenhower's wrath faded away.. Then Balint said in a shivering voice:

- Execution! My wife! What are you talking about!?

Strauss informed him of all details, Balint sensed a pain as sharp as blade.. His hatred towards Jaros grew further, as he always been a nuisance.. But this time he went beyond boundaries.. Strauss looked at balint and said comforting:

- Your wife is a hero.. You should be proud of her, she treated dozens of children voluntarily.. And stood against that filthy corrupt rejecting his tyranny.. And both, we will save her.. And I swear to you, and I give you my word, that I'll give my life for her.. What I demand from both of you now, is to cooperate with me, at least for one last time

Eisenhower stepped closer after he calmed down.. And said in a serene tone:

- If it’s like that, I know that pain really well.. And I won’t let that happen to you Balint, I’m ready to do anything for this

Strauss said to him:

- I know that deep down you have a good heart.. But harsh conditions changed that a bit.. Don't worry I won’t burden you any further, what you've accomplished is enough.. Just don’t kill me during these days, so me and Balint can finish this.. Go inside... I will tell you about this whole corruption network.. And my plan to terminate them.. I will illustrate everything

The three of them went inside, they sat as Strauss began his speech:

Balint, ever since your days in trainings, signs of corruption appeared on Jaros.. His presence didn't make sense, as he wasn't qualified enough, nor did he have any reason, only his wealth, and his silver-tongued words.. He used to flatter and get close to most officials in the branch, even I got deceived by his tricking demeanor.. As with any Westerner, he

is filthy rich.. Over time, his flattery become embodied as gifts.. Initially I didn't doubt anything despite my cautious from any Westerner origins people.. When I inspected later, I found out that these gifts are received frequently by two officers.. “Pato” and “Urgen”.. At that time I was careless about it, and that was my biggest mistake.. Later as your unit was formed, I was surprised to see Jaros name along with your names in the unit.. When I inquired about it, I was told that he had improved and become the most competent.. They even said he is the worthiest for leadership.. As a matter of fact I never saw someone worth for it but you.. But when you requested that Julian be your deputy, I hesitated to accept, because your friendship is known for all, and I was told that Jaros is the right fit.. And unfortunately I accept it.. After a while, I was surprised to see Julian in my office, I thought that he's upset for not assigning him.. But he said to me “I don’t care that you didn’t chose me, but I would have sooner seen a donkey made Deputy than that snake Jaros.”.. And he told me all the details about him.. I was shocked for how much Julian’s memory and investigating for each move or word of Jaros.. I realized that Jaros never changed, rather become worse.. I was ashamed of my negligence, and I was determined that I will make a change.. And when I

did some investigations, I discovered a suspicion of a corruption operations that involves Jaros, Pato, Urgen.. The evidence that were in my hand, were enough only to arrest one of them.. I decided to wait until I can take them all out.. Especially that I've discovered certain names from headquarters involved in this.. It was a was a high risk and sensitive situation, the tables might get turned on me if I rushed to expose it.. But an idea crossed to my mind to eliminate them individually.. I decided to concentrate on the North's case, I received an intel about an opposition laying there.. Such groups as long as they are attempting to hide their identity, suggests that it's not as powerful.. I wanted to eliminate them secretly.. And after that sending the corruption network there and assassinate them.. But the disastrous incident that occurred totally restricted me, and restriction included me only, I found out that the officers has put their names away from this case, and I took most of the blame.. it was highly intense, I felt that my rank is worthless, to the far that others authority in the Western front were far more than mine.. And at that time, corruption is happening openly and I can't do nothing.. Fake arms deals, fake finances, high ranks given for no effort, and many other financial affairs.. The only hope was a victory in the North by least of means..

I wanted to send you there Balint, to cooperate with Eisenhower.. But it was not my intention to accuse you with something false.. My plan was to tell you the truth, and to make the accusation something less.. But I had to... to save your life! I heard talks that you will be assassinated by Jaros plannings.. Time was not on my side to act, I had to fabricate a bribery accusation against you, that would put in you cell but keep you away from the coffin, and the “Royal Guards” act swiftly for such cases, because of the King's guidance for the necessity of terminating corruption quickly.. And that’s what happened, as soon as they received the charges, they arrested you.. And if you weren't under there guardians as a prisoner you would have been a corpse.. Unfortunately, when they realized they can't reach you... they killed poor Julian instead

Balint interrupted the speech after he concentrate carefully:

- Julian! Killed!

- I'm sorry this happened.. If I could I would surely saved him, but they killed him as they didn’t locate you, and they calimed he commit suicide

Balint got up, couldn't hold his nerve saying:

- It went really far... everything he said and I didn’t believe him.. That filthy pig shouldn't see tomorrow!

- We will find the solution.. We will get your vengeance.. But you must hold yourself together and listen

- Solution! Yes what is it

- My plan was that your record will be cleaned by your heroic deed.. The corruption network being ended in the North.. But Jaros attempting to seize your house, and the attempted murder that happened to him, complicated things

- Why? After my record is clean I would not be considered as a corrupted, and his action will be unjustified

- Indeed, your record will be cleaned anyway.. But legally he didn't do something wrong.. The army has the right to seize corrupt’s properties.. His act was based on a current situation and he will not be blamed if you get a pardon later.. He used that law to harm you.. But even if he was illegally seizing the house, that doesn't give the right to your wife to kill him.. And this exactly is what made it complex.. There's only one solution left

- And what is it?

- Exposing the whole thing, the old files, fabricating accusations... and the whole story from stem to stern.. But I'll cover for Eisenhower.. Even though this solution will harm me, but that's the least I can do as a redemption.. I've made a lot of mistakes and ignored a lot of things.. But believe me... I did all that to make right prevail, and to eradicate this corruption group completely, If I rush to it I may take out one, but let a thousand hide.. I had to stand silent to make them feel safe

Then Strauss stood and said firmly:

- I give you my word, and I worth nothing if I don't keep it

Everyone remained silent as Strauss walked to the door.. He turned back saying:

- And all these details will be revealed to the King himself! Only then, it will resolved

Then he looked at Balint saying:

- Your wife situation is a priority to me, don't worry, just both of you stay here.. Because I don't want your come back and the news regarding the end of

the North operations to be rumored.. As this will not be will not be to our good side.. Keep Franz with you so he doesn't open his mouth elsewhere.. It won't take long, I'll be here by tomorrow.. And don't worry this time there is really food and substance in the farm

Eisenhower looked at Franz and said:

- It will be the last two days in your life if you kept your big mouth open during it!

Demise

Two weeks later...

Jaros was sitting in Balint’s house.. That he turned into an office him.. He finally felt victorious.. He just wished that Balint’s wife had accepted him to fulfill his pride and his sense of control even more.. He didn't realize that she was truly rejecting him, as his pride and overconfidence blinded him from that until she tried to kill him.. Fortunately for him he was wearing a bulletproof vest and the bullets only caused minor injuries.. He took a calendar out of his pocket, to see the date of Anett's execution.. He was informed lately that she will be executed without trial and quickly.. Only two days left to that.. He was imagining how he would go there, and see the woman that rejected him hanged.. While he sits relaxed smoking a cigarette in front of her.. He even considered bribing the executioner to stop her proper burial, leaving her body to the stray dogs of the capital.. He was totally immersed in his

fantasies until this immersion was disturbed by a loud knocking on the door.. He opened it and found a military man in an uncommon uniform.. But as he looked carefully, he realized who he is.. The long black coat, the glittering hat, and the unmistakable golden crest of the Crown pinned to his chest.. This was no ordinary soldier, this was the Royal Guard.. Jaros was surprised for his presence, and before he can say a word, The soldier handed him a paper without saying anything, then left.. He opened it and it has the following:

“The headquarters in The Scouting Branch, commissioned you to the North. Please proceed to headquarters as soon as possible”

Colonel Strauss

And on the back of the paper, the usual warning to not ignore these orders.. Jaros tore it up and threw it on the ground stepping on it, stunned by Strauss’s audacity.. He thought that Strauss is trying a desperate move.. a drowning man grasps at a straw.. a desperation move from a loser.. He

decided to go to headquarters to meet his partners, Pato, and Urgen.. On his way everything in his mind was that by a single order from his friends this whole matter will be canceled.. He reached it, and as he stood in front of the gate, he was surprised to see that the guards are different now.. And they are all now Royal guards units.. He hesitantly entered and as he did so the guards moved to the gate and blocked it standing right behind him.. he was puzzled, sensing something was off.. Something he has no clue about.. All he wanted is to see a familiar face to ward doubts away and to be relieved.. He walked in the hallways swiftly seeking one of his colleagues, but no sign of them! Not even a familiar face.. The headquarters was empty suspiciously.. He saw no one but the Royal Guards that were covering every side of the place.. Finally he desperately went to the place he was avoiding ever since he stepped in.. “Strauss’s Office”.. He entered and got surprised to see Strauss sitting on his desk surrounded by several units of the Royal Guards.. initially he involuntarily stepped back few steps.. Strauss gazed him saying:

- What’s wrong Jaros? Are you worried? Intimidated? someone as courage as you, fear shall not be seen upon him

Jaros froze in his place unable to reply.. Strauss continued saying:

- But you've arrived quickly after informing you.. This emphasizes your eagerness, and your huge love and loyalty to your work.. Which you are known for!

Jaros got even more puzzled and said

- What do you want from me! And why the Royal Guards are everywhere!!

but Strauss continued his speech ignoring him:

- And I'm certain, that your determination and desire to go will grow further, when you know that you are assigned to save your friend and leader "Balint".. We received news that he have been kidnapped there.. And I personally assigned you with this mission, because everything said about you is impressive.. And this is your file in front of me.. Everything written here makes you just the suitable person for such an act

Then Strauss grabbed it and read:

- Intelligent. Skilled sniper. Endurance. The main reason to achieve many victories in the western

front. Beloved. A born leader. Freed a whole unit by himself. Perfect fitness

Strauss spontaneously laughed as he read “Perfect fitness” and he sarcastically said:

- I’ll stop there, 'Perfect fitness' seems a bit… generous, given what I see now

Strauss was smiling and the Royal Guards around him looking at Jaros coldly.. While Jaros is sweating out of fear.. He stepped a bit close putting his shaking hands over the desk and said in a shivering tone:

- Where Pato and Urgen, I need to talk to them

- Of course! Specifically you three, are going to talk for a very long time

- What?! Where are they?! Talk!

- They are there waiting for you.. Don't worry.. Quick we don’t want to make those gentlemen wait longer, shouldn't we? As they, are the ones responsible to take you there... peacefully!

Jaros realized that he's in a big trouble.. He felt anger and anxious, but at the same time he is

helpless, as he is surrounded by the Royal Guards.. He start looking around him, desperately hoping to see someone he knows, to take him out of this.. But he saw nothing but the faces of the guards staring at him coldly witnessing his humiliation.. which frightened him even more.. Then he looked at Strauss, speechless.. And Strauss put salt in the wound by saying in a sharp tone:

- You used to make other people as tools to serve you.. How does it feel now to be the tool? Get out of my face servilely!

Jaros was taken to the North, escorted by the Royal Guards.. He was silent all the way but just as they arrived he tried a final desperate pathetic attempt to bribe the guards.. He was beaten and thrown by them.. The vehicle moved fast away from him, leaving him alone and unarmed.. He got up looking around him.. Then he started to follow the road trails next to him.. He was walking alone the wood, until he saw a cabin from far away.. He ran to it and as he entered he saw his colleagues in it.. He start to talk immediately:

- Pato! Urgen! What is happening? What is, TELL ME! NOW!

Both of them were in a harsh condition, ragged clothes, and bruises all over their bodies.. Unarmed, not even a kitchen knife.. Sitting down on the ground with no words coming out of them.. Jaros continued saying:

- TALK! WHAT HAPPENED! why did they send us here!! they told me I have to save that dog Balint! how are we supposed to do this in such condition

Pato looked at him a contemptuous look and said:

- Jaros... you are really an idiot.. And we are more because we dealt with you.. They found out everything Jaros... EVERYTHING! We were exposed because of your tyranny and things you did only to satisfy your ego.. You wanted to hurt Balint with no planning you fool.. We told you to risking us and you didn't care.. The whole Scouting Branch got dissolved, and we've been banished here to die.. But don't worry, we're not alone, even some names that helped us from the headquarters were exposed too.. But they were unlucky... they got extrajudicial executions.. The board has been cleared, Jaros.. We weren't the players, we were the pawns

- I’m the one to blame you filthy rat! I've gave you everything and I was always in the front.. You must have snitched on me to them!

- I wish I did, maybe I wouldn't have got this much of beaten.. But they've known everything earlier

Urgen interfered saying:

- You can say whatever... and cry your heart out to death! But it won’t change anything

- NO NO NO! I'm not spending the rest of my life with dirty animals like you

Jaros rushed out of the cabin in panic of the truth he realized.. He ran in circling the cabin with no point.. He can't ran back to the Kingdom, as he have to go through a long way, and checkpoint will recognize him and arrest him.. He remained in his confusion until Pato and Urgent went out.. Pato came close to him and said:

- We are banished here accept it.. And you must know something, that we are surprised to see you.. Because they informed us that you specifically will be punished severely, because they found out what you did with Julian.. Now go and hunt for us some rabbits before we die of h...

Pato couldn’t finish his words, as a bullet pierced his head killing him instantly.. Both of Jaros and Urgen froze in their places.. Seconds pass by and a second shot took out Urgen as well.. Jaros ran as fast as he can while he is intensively panicked.. Running for his life, seeking to be sheltered by woods.. And just before he merges into the trees ,he was shot in the knee.. Making him fell to the ground.. He gathered himself and leaned on a tree next to him.. He tried to walk but he fell immediately.. The wound was severe.. He crawled on his blood that was pouring out of him.. After few minutes.. He collapsed.. Halted and he lay down on a rock.. He grabbed his wound trying to stem the blood.. But his lack of experience didn't help him.. He looked around him intimidated, by who could be behind all this.. When he realized that they are not banished, rather been brought here to be killed.. He realized another thing that scared him more, each of Pato and urgen were killed by one shot, while he got wounded only.. and this indicates that the sniper wants him alive, at least for some time.. Suddenly, he began to hear footsteps coming from forward, followed by Balint coming from between the trees.. Holding his rifle, his eyes gleaming intensely.. He came close to Jaros, took out his gun and shoot at him on a specific area in his chest.. Jaros fell aside..

He tried to gather himself again but he couldn’t.. He turned on his back and tried to talk. but the blood coming out of his mouth choked him.. He reached by his hand to Balint as if he's seeking mercy.. Balint came close.. And went on his knees putting one of his feet on Jaros’s chest.. he pressed mightily, and looked at him with an evident contempt.. And said:

- How good is it to see you in this way

- (breathing heavily)

- Talk what's wrong? did you lose your voice?

- (tries to, but he gasped for breath)

- You were too sure of yourself and thought it was permanent

- (fear in his eyes accompanied by heavy breath)

- It was your own shadow that tripped you, Jaros.. The higher you climbed on your lies, the further you had to fall.. You lived like a snake, and you’ll die like one

Balint aimed his rifle, between Jaros’s eyes.. And ended everything.

The End

Balint went back to the Kingdom.. He got honored.. Hailed as a hero.. Despite the oppression he faced, he terminated the risk that threatened the Kingdom.. And Eisenhower was not forgotten, The King granted him a quiet life a house, a pension, and the one thing the North couldn't provide, peace.. After he met King Zoltan, the King understood the situation, and gave Strauss absolute authority, to do what's necessary, and provided him with the Royal Guards.. But for this to be Strauss’s final mission.. The Scouting Branch was dismantled, its records burned and its men absorbed into other units.. It was the end of an era, and Strauss’s final act of service.. Moved by the story of the woman who defended children, King Zoltan issued a full royal pardon.. Anett was no longer a criminal, she was a symbol of the people's courage.. Balint and Anett are together again.. Strauss decided to spend his time in his farm, despite he got discharged, but he was honorably discharged.. But the good news

didn’t stop here, ceasefire is announced! The outrageous war between the Kingdom and the Westerners has finally come to an end.. Everyone was filled with joyfulness, as finally they will live the peace they always wished for

But how long it would...

Written by:

BAHAA

Thanks to all who reached here and special thanks for the first reader of this book